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## LICENCE TO THRILL: COBRA

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ISSUE 154

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THE GARGOYLE ARTIST ON GIVING LIFE TO SOME OF ITS BIGGEST GAMES

## THE MAKING OF STARSTRIKE I & II

HOW REALTIME GAMES MADE ITS HIT SPECTRUM 3D BLASTER


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## THE RETROBATES
FAVOURITE QUAKE GAME



### DARRAN JONES
The Gothic setting and architecture of the original still makes it feel fresh and exciting to me.
**Expertise:**
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine
**Currently playing:**
*Mario Picross*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Strider*



### GRAEME MASON
The original. It blew me away with its graphics that were simply nothing like I had seen before, and a world above the flat 3D sprites of the build engine.
**Expertise:**
Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
**Currently playing:**
*Rise Of The Tomb Raider*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Resident Evil 4*



### DAVID CROOKES
*Quake III Arena* felt rather pure for me and so quickly became my favourite of the series.
**Expertise:**
Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, Dizzy, and PlayStation (but is it retro? Debate!)
**Currently playing:**
*The Day Of The Tentacle Remastered*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Broken Sword*

### NICK THORPE
Before motion sickness ruined the FPS genre for me, *Quake III Arena* spent a whole lot of time in my Dreamcast.
**Expertise:**
Owning five Master Systems (I sold two)
**Currently playing:**
*Trackmania Turbo*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Sonic The Hedgehog*



### MARTYN CARROLL
The PC original. At my first office job we used to play it over the LAN at lunchtimes. It became a rite of passage for new starters.
**Expertise:**
Sinclair stuff
**Currently playing:**
*The Vanishing of Ethan Carter*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Jet Set Willy*



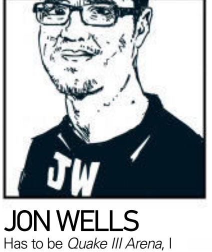
### PAUL DRURY
Though the main *Quake* series rather passed me by, I was impressed by the *Team Fortress* mod, though I'm sure no one was pleased to have me on their side…
**Expertise:**
Factory-damaged Spectrums
**Currently playing:**
*Firewatch*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Sheep In Space*

### ANDREW FISHER
I spent the most time on *Quake II* for PlayStation, playing single-player.
**Expertise:**
Commodore 64 and Nintendo fan, gaming for 33 years
**Currently playing:**
*Barnsley Badger*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Super Mario World*



### PAUL DAVIES
*Quake III*: It was a lunchtime pastime for at least a year, though I could never use the Rail Gun. That was my great undoing.
**Expertise:**
Writing much better in my sleep
**Currently playing:**
*Destiny: Taken King*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*





### JON WELLS
Has to be *Quake III Arena*, I remember enjoying the previous two, but nowhere near as much as I did *Quake III*.
**Expertise:**
Tackling dirty nappies and retro spreads
**Currently playing:**
*Far Cry Primal*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Super Mario World*

# LOADING…



My first experience of *Quake* wasn't what I expected. I had been invited around my friend's house as they were having a LAN party and *Quake* was on the menu. I'd never been to one before so I was somewhat surprised when it turned out to be a small group of guys playing PC games.

Everyone was playing on the computers they had brought over, while I was given a crusty laptop. I started playing and BAM I was dead. A quick respawn later and I was downed again, before I could even see what hit me. It turned out that the machine wasn't powerful enough to output anything but the lowest resolution and I was struggling to make out who was hitting me. Ranting into a tirade about the unevenness of PC gaming as a fair gaming platform, I instead played the single-player – and was blown away.

I loved the Gothic architecture and *D&D*-styled aesthetics and happily played for a couple of hours. It felt new and exciting and even on a low-end laptop it was easy to see that *Quake's* graphics were something special. A quick move over to my friend's computer highlighted that it was amazing in multiplayer too. It left such an impression on me that I still play it to this day.

Enjoy the magazine!



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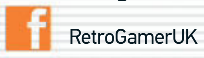
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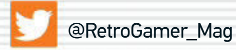
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Ultimate Guide: Desert Strike 64



Licence To Thrill: Cobra 44


"Battlezone 2000 is a game that every Lynx owner needs in their collection"





Minority Report: Atari Lynx 74
Thought the Lynx was just good for arcade conversions? Think again

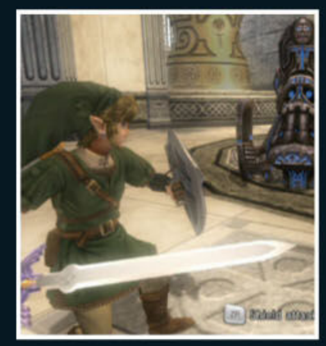




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The Coleco branding generated renewed interest in Retro VGS' project after a crowdfunding failure.

# CHAMELEON'S CAMOUFLAGE FAILS

## Retro VGS' cartridge-based console falls to fake prototype controversy

The Chameleon, a new console that purported to offer an authentic retro experience, has met a controversial end after doubts arose about the legitimacy of the prototypes shown by developer Retro Video Game Systems.

The Chameleon started life as the Retro VGS, a new console with cartridge-based games and no online connectivity, which could reimplement old hardware with a unique FPGA architecture. "We were told that the Retro VGS would run our SNES games off the FPGA board. So, basically, all we would need to do is provide Mike Kennedy and his team the SNES game ROM, and we'd get a percentage of each sale," explains John Lester of CollectorVision, which was intended to provide *The Adventures Of Tiny Knight* as a pack-in game for the console. "They would handle the production side of things too, so there was no additional time or money from us to do this. It made sense at the time to get involved." However, the ambitious $1.95 million IndieGoGo campaign failed thanks to the high $300 asking price for a console and the lack of a working prototype.

River West Brands was announced as a partner in December, lending the Coleco branding to the rechristened Coleco Chameleon – a cheaper version of the same concept. A debut for the prototype was set for the New York Toy Fair in mid-February. "We were still told that the Chameleon would run SNES games, so nothing changed for us," John explains. "We were told the system wouldn't be able to handle *Unity* and other programs like the VGS, but that didn't affect the way we program our games anyway. Keep in mind that we never officially signed any agreement with the Chameleon team – it was all done on handshake agreements etc. until we had something in writing."

On the first day of the New York Toy Fair, a launch date for the Chameleon's Kickstarter was announced for February 27th and the machine was shown as planned, with posts on the official Coleco Chameleon Facebook page claiming that the games on show were running "through our custom written SNES FPGA core". However, members of the AtariAge forum noted that the prototype, which could only play SNES games and used SNES controllers, had the shape of an Atari Jaguar with the SNS-101 version of the SNES motherboard stuffed inside it.

"Just like everyone else, we were surprised to see the back of the system

## READERS REACT

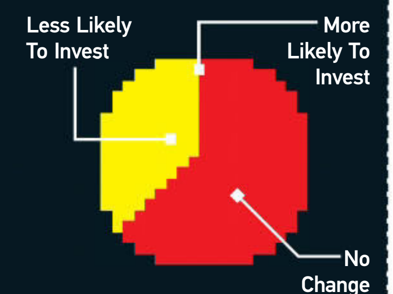
**Has the Coleco Chameleon controversy affected your chances of backing future hardware crowdfunding projects?**

No change for me. I've backed the odd bit of hardware in the past that hasn't come to fruition/failed to reach target (though not quite as expensive as the Chameleon). It's a risk you take with crowdfunding of any sort. **Antiriad2097**

There's no change from me. I'll continue to back projects with credible goals, from people who I can trust, and where I'm interested in getting my hands on the finished product. Unfortunately, this was none of those. **Matt_B**

We're talking about larger sums of money when it comes to backing hardware, so this controversy makes me less likely to back projects in the future. **merman**

I am less likely to back a console after watching this entire fiasco unfold. I've backed a lot of documentaries and books [in the past], which have all been successful, but more expensive stuff like consoles just seem far less reliable. **flying_delorean81**

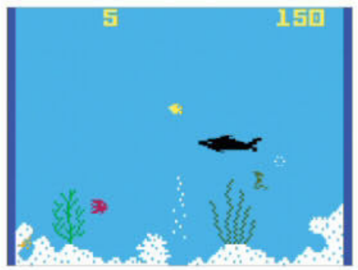


» The controversial image that appears to show a video capture card inside a clear console shell.

Visit retrogamer.net to see John Lester's interview in full!




» [SNES] CollectorVision had hoped to bring *Sydney Hunter And The Caverns Of Death* to the Chameleon.




» [Intellivision] As well as ColecoVision classics, Retro VGS appeared to have Intellivision re-releases lined up.




» [SNES] *The Adventures Of Tiny Knight* was originally meant to be the Retro VGS pack-in game.

> "We did have doubts like everyone else when images started to come out of system itself"
>
> John Lester

at the Toy Fair and other pictures of the system and board," John tells us. "We were never provided a prototype in our hands to test our games ourselves, but we were told that there would be one shown for the Kickstarter campaign, and that we'd be provided dev units after the campaign. So yes, we did have doubts like everyone else when images started to come out of system itself."

When the intended launch date of the Kickstarter arrived, the campaign was delayed "to make it even better" as the system had seen a lot of interest at the New York Toy Fair. However, a series of pictures showing a clear Coleco Chameleon with a visible circuit board was released in order to reassure potential buyers. Within a few days AtariAge forum members had discovered that the PCB in the case was an old PC video capture card. Within minutes of the discovery, the most revealing photographs of the machine were removed from the Coleco Chameleon Facebook page, with all comments hidden from the public.

When Coleco made a public statement on the subject on 2 March, giving Retro VGS one week to demonstrate a working prototype, a variety of people who were or had been involved with the Chameleon quickly began to distance themselves from the project. Brian Thomas Barnhart of *The Jag Bar* YouTube show shared the script for the machine's Kickstarter pitch video. *RETRO Videogame Magazine*, described in the IndieGoGo campaign as "a magazine that complements the console", also suffered as its editor, David Giltinan, resigned from his post. While most of the fallout centred on Retro VGS, John and the CollectorVision team also felt some of the fallout. "We got some heat from some people regarding our involvement as a third-party publisher, but I think, for the most part, most people understand that we had nothing to do with any of decisions or hardware choices made for this project," he explains. Six days later, Coleco confirmed that Retro VGS felt unable to demonstrate a prototype and that the project had been amicably discontinued, with Retro VGS's online presences were hastily taken down shortly afterwards.

Just before we went to press, Retro VGS' Mike Kennedy addressed AtariAge to share his side of the story, in a lengthy post which was met with extreme scepticism by forum members. Mike Kennedy accused another member of the project of massive fraud, alleging that he was instructed not to show the rear of the Toy Fair prototype, and described a crisis of conscience at the Toy Fair as the internet uncovered the false prototype. He further claims that he was also taken in by the clear shell prototype, stating that "when [the alleged scammer] first emailed me the images, he indicated this was our prototype 100 per cent." According to the post, that person "even joked about how people online were trying to identify the board in our shell, laughing and telling me they won't find it because it's our original work". Mike Kennedy claims to have paid this alleged scammer almost $10,000 and received "nothing to show for it except two fake prototypes and *no FGPA cores*".

We're still following this controversial story, and hope to provide further updates in a future issue. ✱

## A CASE OF THE VAPOURS

**Here are some other consoles that failed to take form…**

### KONIX MULTISYSTEM

■ The British manufacturer's debut console was well on the way to market – Flare Technology had designed the hardware and developers were working on software. However, Konix found itself short of the resources to complete the project and despite selling its joystick range to keep it afloat, ultimately bankrupted itself.

### HASBRO CONTROL-VISION

■ This VHS-based console began life at Axlon, Nolan Bushnell's post-Atari toy manufacturer, but was very much the brainchild of future Digital Pictures CEO Tom Zito. It even had games ready to go in the form of *Night Trap* and *Sewer Shark*, but manufacturer Hasbro pulled out when it couldn't launch for the price it wanted.

### PANASONIC M2

■ When Matsushita bought the planned successor to the 3DO for $100 million, it seemed the company was serious about entering the games market, and the hardware packed a punch. However, competition from Sony and Nintendo scared the company off and the hardware ended up powering Konami arcade games.

### INFINIUM LABS PHANTOM

■ The Phantom was ahead of its time – between its downloadable games and PC-compatible hardware, it's similar to today's Steam Boxes. However, doubts were raised over the hardware displayed at E3 2004 and the company was accused of a 'pump and dump' scheme by US authorities.

### GIZMONDO WIDESCREEN

■ This updated model of Tiger Telematics' handheld was to feature a bigger screen, more memory and a faster processor. Announcing it months after the original hit Europe wasn't smart, but it didn't matter – the company collapsed when the past convictions of its executives came to light.



## JIM BAGS A RECORD

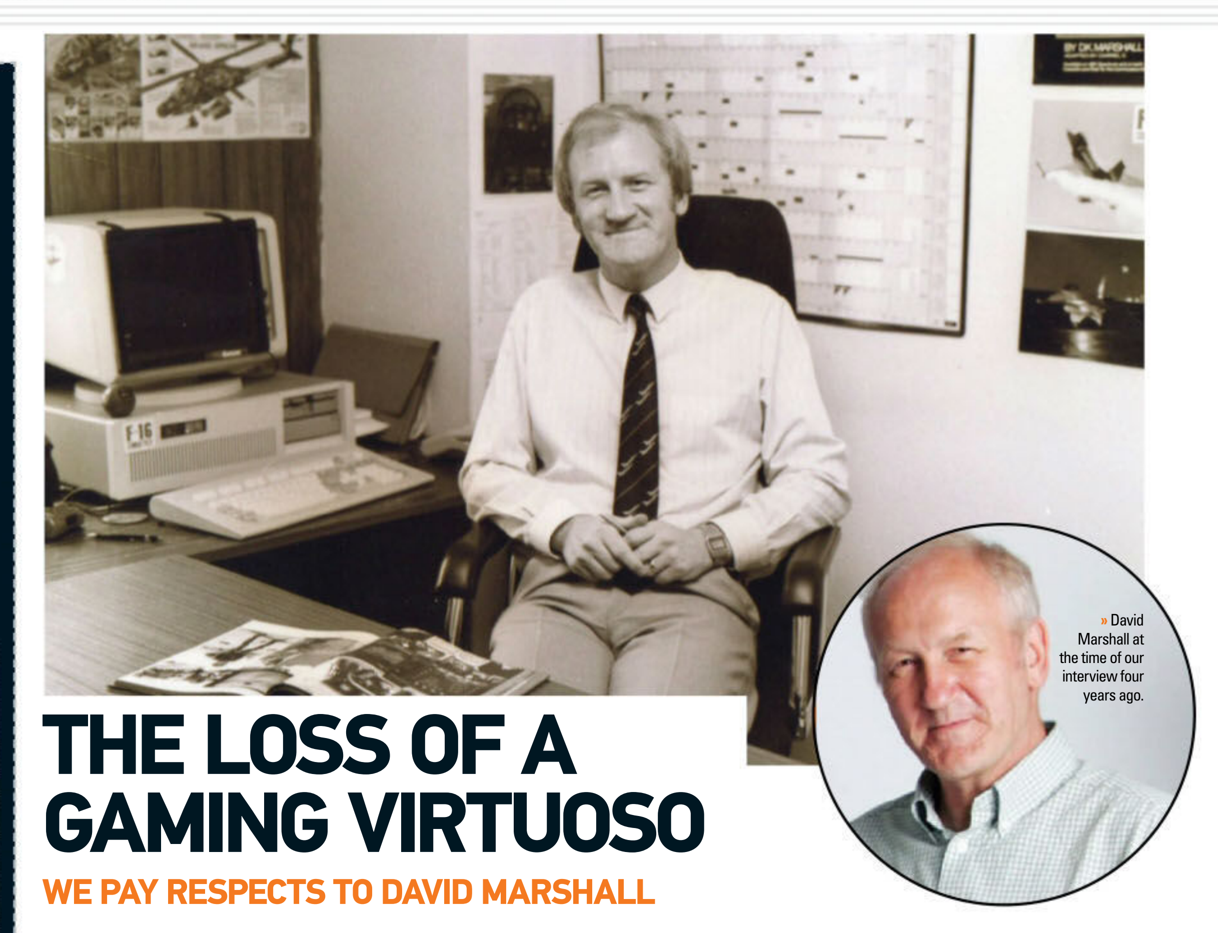
**Retro Gamer** reported a few months ago about Jim Bagley's latest endeavour, squeezing the LaserDisc classic *Dragon's Lair* into the Sinclair ZX81. Encouraged by the enthusiastic response to his ambitious conversion, Jim offered the game to the *Guinness Book Of Records* and last month duly received his certificate. Claiming the record for 'largest videogame ported to the Sinclair ZX81', *Dragon's Lair* contains 15,824,610 bytes and the official confirmation will no doubt take pride of place in the Bagley household.




## THE RETURN OF PANG

After being announced in July last year, *Pang Adventures* – DotEmu's first PS4 game – has now been slated for release on the 19th April. This brand new episode in the adventures of the Pang Brothers comes with the apparent blessing of the original's developers and will feature new weapons, boss fights and power ups. *Pang Adventures* will also see action on the Xbox One, PC and mobile and looks to meld the simple gameplay of the original with modern aesthetics. Expect our review soon.





» David Marshall at the time of our interview four years ago.

# THE LOSS OF A GAMING VIRTUOSO

## WE PAY RESPECTS TO DAVID MARSHALL

It's with sadness we report the passing of a legend of 8-bit computing and the flight simulation scene, David Marshall, who was co-owner of Digital Integration.

The software house was formed in 1982 by David and Rod Swift, the two having met at the Royal Aircraft Establishment. As an engineer, David worked on conventional flight simulators, and when Sinclair Research unveiled its ZX80 and ZX81 computers, he saw an opportunity to create technically realistic flight simulations for public enjoyment.

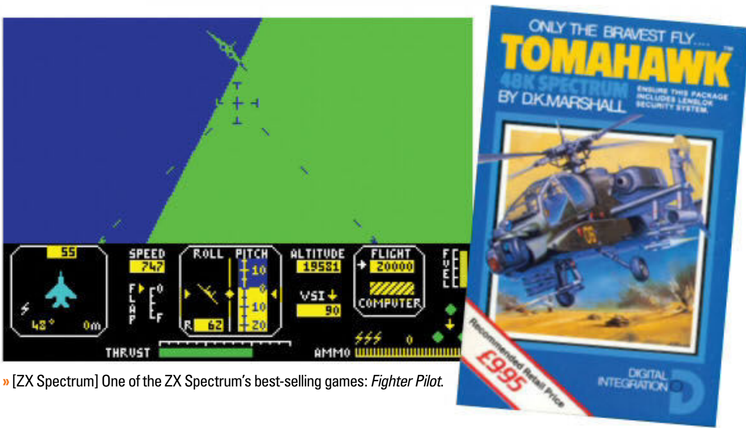
The ZX81 versions of *Fighter Pilot* and *Night Gunner* (both written by David in his spare time) were not graphically exciting, yet contained an impressive level of authenticity under the hood. David's first Spectrum game was an updated version of *Fighter Pilot*, which greatly improved the graphics and gameplay, and infused it with perspective and aerodynamic data, giving the game an unprecedented level of authenticity.

Throughout the Eighties, Digital Integration, buoyed by the success of *Fighter Pilot*, solidified its name in flight simulations. David's follow-up to *Fighter Pilot*, *Tomahawk*, shifted focus to the eponymous helicopter, and was another bestselling game. However, the pressures of day-to-day running of a software house meant that as the decade proceeded, he became less involved in programming.

But the flight sims kept coming. The 16-bit *Tornado*, based on the European jet-fighter made famous in the recent Iraq war, was an excellent game, and one of DI's finest. Echoing his earlier graduation from *Fighter Pilot* to *Tomahawk*, David's team produced *Apache Longbow* and *Hind*, two well-respected helicopter simulations that helped break it into the expanding PC market of the mid-Nineties.

Yet despite these bestselling titles, business became difficult. The long development times for flight simulations meant DI had long periods where it needed filler product to keep afloat, and competition was fiercer, too. When Titus bought the company in the late Nineties, ostensibly to expand its own PC profile, it appeared to be a logical solution; when it tried to push Digital Integration into console development, cracks began to appear in the relationship. After one disagreement too many, David left in 1999 and Digital Integration slowly sunk into obscurity, before Titus itself went under in 2005. David himself mixed retirement with Laminar Research's *X-Plane* and teaching banjo.

**Retro Gamer** interviewed David in June 2012, at his home in Farnborough, Hampshire and our From The Archives: Digital Integration appeared in issue 108. A true pioneer of the early 8-bit computing scene, David will be missed, and our condolences go to his family. David passed away March 2016 aged 62, after a long battle with cancer.




» [ZX Spectrum] One of the ZX Spectrum's best-selling games: *Fighter Pilot*.

**Here's my bio… Paul Davies**
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



# Be Yourself

It's the most irritating piece of advice from grown-ups when you're trying to figure out who the heck you really are in the first place, but I'm starting to get the idea now. It's the same with games, it seems.

You know what (and I reckon you do), games shouldn't ever try to be a big deal. They sometimes are a big deal, much to the surprise of, for example, *Dr. Kawashima's Brain Training* or *Angry Birds*, but aiming to be 'big and clever' nearly always leads to downfall. True or not (Florent Gorges argues convincingly otherwise), the well-known translation of Nintendo as 'leave luck to heaven' works best in my book. Studios or individuals that make the experience they truly believe in have the best possible chance of shining through… Even if only a small section of the intended audience falls in love with it too.

I really think that this is an issue that Ono-san's team ran into with *Street Fighter V* in February. On the one hand, there is the game itself which – by many honourable accounts – is not only one of the best in the *Street Fighter* series, but showing signs of becoming one of the greatest (in-depth, fun) fighting games in genre history. The question marks are only above how *Street Fighter V* has been served, in a manner that hasn't met the expectations of its consumers; without an 'Arcade Mode' – although the game has never been in the 'arcades' or game centres – but with smaller introductory story modes for each character and a fairly in-depth training mode. I am happy to believe that Capcom and Ono-san delivered what they considered to be the perfect opening gambit to a potentially evergreen fighting game platform.

*Street Fighter V* didn't set the world on fire upon its arrival, with sales much lower than *Street Fighter IV*. Capcom's bean-pushers have some adjusting to do. Gamers, though, should just get on with playing against each other online or together at home on the sofa. 'Beating heads' is what *Street Fighter* is all about. If you rage-quit, you are a tit and you have to live with it.

You know what: I love the fact that *Street Fighter V* currently has niche appeal. It's a wake-up call to an awful lot of gamers that the eyes of the world are not focused on gaming, and usually don't care about some of the names that we hold nearest and dearest. I love that *Dragon Quest Heroes* is kind of awesome, but guys who only buy *FIFA* and *Call Of Duty* don't need to care. Cleverer people than I will scoff at my heart still swelling every time that I load up *Destiny*, even though *Tom Clancy's The Division* has objectively more mass-market appeal. The guys I compete against in Crucible care a lot, and prove it by being so incredibly skilled sometimes that I want to drop the controller and laugh.

We need to draw a distinction between the cynical match-three style money pits and the sincere efforts of creative studios worldwide. Instead of saying this will be big according to axes X and Y, I'm willing to bet that our most beloved gaming memories emerged from a bunch of guys standing by their work as being something they were genuinely proud to represent. ★

> "I love the fact that Street Fighter V has niche appeal"

## What do you think?

**Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:**

RetroGamerUK | @RetroGamer_Mag | retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk | www.retrogamer.net/forum



## JEWEL IN THE CROWN

### THAT PIECE YOU CAN'T BE WITHOUT

**ORIGINAL BOXED DOOM**

■ "I bought a large number of games off an eBay seller, pretty much all his auctions, and he chucked in some stuff for free because I'd made it easier for him. I was absolutely gobsmacked when I opened up the shipping box and saw this little gem staring up at me!"

**PAID: $0**

**BREACH AND RULES OF ENGAGEMENT SET**

"This was a revolutionary concept where if you installed both games they would combine to be a single game. If you ordered a boarding action in one game, it would launch the second game to then play that out."

**PAID: $150**

**WING COMMANDER SERIES**

"I think this was the first set of games that I played where you could finish the game and still lose."

**PAID: $300**

**BATTLETECH: THE CRESCENT HAWK'S INCEPTION**

"This was the first computer game my parents bought for me for my Commodore 64 and it introduced me to a new world."

**PAID: $0**

**ODST ARMOUR**

"It's another level of immersion I guess. I wear them to gaming and comic conventions and it's pretty neat to be able to say you have the suit from such and such game."

**PAID: $2000**

# Collector's corner

## Readers take us through the retro keyhole

It may not have done much for the environment, but the explosion of oversized videogame cardboard boxes back in the Eighties and Nineties certainly led to some very impressive-looking packages. The trend was most notable with PC games, and that is where this month's collector, Rick from Calgary, Alberta, specialises. "When I think back, I guess PC gaming had more of an edge over consoles back in the Nineties," explains Rick, who boasts hundreds of beautiful, glossy classic PC titles in his collection. "Games had better graphics, more in-depth gameplay and you had better control choices," he smiles. "The big box era was pretty much the golden era to me, and you also got a lot more physical swag in the average regular release. As [for] the games, a lot more boundaries were being pushed back then – who wasn't completely blown away by *making a loaf of bread* in *Ultima 7*?!"

Similar to much of Nintendo's back catalogue, acquiring mint boxed PC games from the era is becoming increasingly difficult. "Given that most of these games are over 20 years old and the mint ones are usually in the hands of other collectors, it is becoming much harder," laments Rick. "Most retro shops here cater to the console gamer so I do most of my shopping online via eBay and forums." Yet despite this, playing old PC games is easier than ever thanks to websites such as GOG.com. "I think what they are doing is wonderful, bringing attention to games that would have otherwise been long forgotten, and catering to both nostalgic and younger gamers."

Rick's favourite game of all time is an unusual one, so we conclude by asking him to tell us more about *Planet's Edge* from New World Computing. "I like to think of it as being a precursor to modern sci-fi action RPGs such as *Mass Effect*," he says. "It was open world, had resource gathering, crafting, space combat, ship customisation, trading, exploring and puzzles – it's probably the most epic space RPG of all time – and came on just three 1.44-megabyte disks!" ✱

**IBM 30 PC**

"I think it's pretty amazing I own a piece of PC history, brand new, that had sat unopened and unloved in a warehouse for the past 25 years!"

**PAID: $600**

### BIO

**NAME:** Rick Chan

**ESTIMATED VALUE:** $50,000-$60,000

**FAVOURITE CONSOLE:** IBM Model 30 (circa 1991)

**FAVOURITE GAME:** *Planet's Edge (PC)*



# The Dark Room

## Paul Drury meets evil dungeon master and Videogame Nation host, John Robertson

**How would you describe your show, *The Dark Room*?**
Hysterical, interactive fun! I've taken the worst kind of old videogames, text-based adventures, and made them into a live comedy the whole audience plays. It's a *Choose Your Own Adventure* for hundreds of people. With better jokes.

**How did you come up with the idea of an en masse adventure?**
I was messing around with a crowd of about two thousand people in a theatre and thought, 'Wouldn't it be cool if I turned off all the lights and pretended to be a hard videogame?' I ended up getting four million YouTube hits and touring the world for five years. The show has evolved, so now I have armour, lights, a video intro, and the options on the screen. It's like I'm constantly patching it.

**Have you had any especially memorable performances?**
At London ComicCon, a seven-foot bloke dressed as a dark elf from *Skyrim* came up to me on stage and held a wooden sword to my throat. That was the only time I genuinely feared for my life. Once I was doing the show in Edinburgh and a grey haired gentleman came up to me and said, 'Hello, my name's Ian Livingston and I invented the thing you're parodying!' That was great – he played *Dark Room* and unlocked screens hardly anyone sees but then got to the 'Evolve' option and refused to cast off his clothes.

**How disappointing.**
It was kind of a relief. He was great, though, a real industry legend and we went out for ciders afterwards.

**Did you grow up playing text adventures?**
The first I played was on an Acorn computer at school. You were in a cave and when you picked up the map, it just said, 'You grow weaker' and would kill you. I wish I could remember the name! I was fascinated by how angry it made people. I loved *Hitchhiker's Guide* and the original *Zork*, which is delightful and funny.

**Would you like to see more comedy in videogames?**
Yes but the trouble is when they try to put humour in games, it ends up going to a committee, dozens of people trying to arrive at a joke they think a 15-year-old boy will laugh at. Look, just write a joke you like and put it out! I do a show where most of the audience doesn't know what a text adventure is. They like it because I like it and have total belief in what I am doing.

**Have you ever tried doing versions of other videogame genres?**
I've played *Pong* with a theatre audience. You get a child and make them run to one end of the stage and smack into the wall and then everyone on that side of the wall has to go 'Dup!' [makes the *Pong* ball noise] and then the kid runs to the other side… I really like taking simple things and making them big!

» John has performed *The Dark Room* over three hundred times across the globe.

**Wait a second, haven't we seen you on television, too?**
[Laughs] yes, I'm a presenter on *Videogame Nation* on Challenge, which is currently the only videogame review show broadcast in the UK. We started in 2014, we're on series four and I just shot episode 90. Once people find it, they stick with it. I've managed to get away with some unmitigated filth on the show, which is what I love about this country.

Videogame nation airs on Challenge. Visit thejohnrobertson.com for full dates of *The Dark Room* and for clips of this unique, hilarious and lovingly retro show.

> **"At one show, a grey haired gentleman came up to me and said, 'I'm Ian Livingston and I invented the thing you're parodying!"**
> John Robertson




» *The Dark Room* lets you play your own text adventure live. 'FIND LIGHT SWITCH,' say we!




» John (far right) co-presents Videogame Nation with Dan Maher and Aoife Wilson and it's worth a watch.

# BACK TO THE NINETIES

# THE LATEST NEWS FROM MAY 1999

[Arcade] *Street Fighter III Third Strike: Fight For The Future* was big of name but also big on gameplay.

**MAY 1999 – Dolphin comes up for air, 3rd Strike punches above its weight, Hyper Neo-Geo 64 says goodbye, Lode Runner goes 3D, Breakout goes Super and the GBC goes fishing. Richard Burton catches something in Cod Cave…**




The month began with Nintendo holding a press conference to announce it had begun development of a new console to succeed the N64. It would be codenamed Project Dolphin eventually becoming the more familiar Nintendo GameCube.

Nintendo would again call on ArtX, a company created by former Silicon Graphics engineers, to create the graphics hardware for the new console, as it did for the N64. A release date of summer 2001 was set which would pitch it in direct competition with the PlayStation 2 and, at that time, Microsoft's undisclosed console. The GameCube faced a testing future and it had not even been created yet.

Arcades welcomed the latest incarnation in Capcom's *Street Fighter* series, the ramblingly titled *Street Fighter III 3rd Strike: Fight For The Future*. This second follow-up to *Street Fighter III* and 16th manifestation of the 2D fighting game in coin-op form extended the roster to 20 fighters and reintroduced an old fan favourite, Chun-Li, as well as new characters Remy, Q, Twelve and Makoto.

The fighting gameplay and physics had been polished and developed the refinements included a grading system giving you bonus points for completing predetermined tasks, choice of game paths and an ear-throbbingly splendid new soundtrack. There was also the joyous return of the car smash mini-game, which was first seen in Capcom's *Street Fighter II*.

While yet another *Street Fighter* game might have caused much yawning from wearisome beat-'em-up gamers, *Street Fighter III 3rd Strike* proved to be one of the most underrated games in the series.

Released on the PlayStation in North America exactly a year to the day it was released in Japan was *Lunar: Silver Star Story Complete*, a role-playing game published by Working Designs. The English language edition was released as a four-disc special edition collector's box set including a cloth map, soundtrack and a hardback manual. This would go some way to explaining the hefty $60 price tag.

While the package was unquestionably top notch would the game back-up the slick glossy extravagance of the embellishments? Yes, it would. The game was not just an English conversion but an enhanced remake of the original Japanese game released in 1996 on the Sega Saturn Mega-CD as *Lunar: The Silver Star*. One major enhancement was the voice acting, it was much improved with 20 voiced characters rather than just five as in the original game.

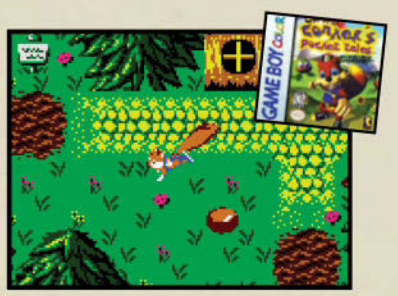
You are Alex, a young lad, who has been chosen to become the future Dragonmaster. You must pass tasks created by the dragons to fulfil this position while also stopping a sorcerer intent on controlling the world.

While graphically it was somewhat disappointing, the gameplay was superb with the beautifully voiced characters, the indulgent and immersive gameplay was impressive and the story included a variety of quirky and unexpected twists.

Continuing this month's trend for ridiculously long videogame names came another arcade coin-op




[Game Boy Color] Fishing without the guts, scales and fishy juices, that's a win right there.




[Game Boy Color] *Conker's Pocket Tales* was a misfire for Rare and well below its usual impeccable standards.

# THIS MONTH IN…

## PC ACCELERATOR

May was a big *Star Wars* month. *The Phantom Menace* film was released as were two *Star Wars* PC games with *PC Accelerator* covering both extensively. The game of the film action adventure received lukewarm approval and *Star Wars: Episode 1 - Racer*, based on the Pod Racing sequence, fared better.




## OPM (USA)

Interspersed between the saturation coverage of all things *Star Wars* was an update on Sony's PS2 specifications. The two main components were confirmed as being the 128-bit Emotion Engine CPU and the Graphics Synthesizer supplying a peak drawing capacity of 75 million polygons per second.

## AMIGA FORMAT

The Amiga mag debated software piracy with a variety of views aired. One software house boss spoke of its game selling only 1,000 copies worldwide despite having a massive following. Apparently they had more pirated copies registered than originals sold and so they scrapped plans for a sequel.




offering. *Buriki One: World Grapple Tournament '99 In Tokyo* was developed by SNK and was the seventh and final game produced for the short-lived successor to the MVS format, the Hyper Neo-Geo 64.

You choose your character from the roster of 11 available each with their own varied fighting style in a wide range of disciplines including boxing, wrestling and Aikido. You pummel your way through the opposition before taking on the reigning champion.

The controls take getting used to, with the two fire buttons controlling the movement of your character while the joystick is used for attacks.

*Buriki One* was easily the best of the Hyper Neo-Geo 64 titles and a real gem of a fighting game that really would've prospered given a wider audience had it been ported to home consoles. It's a rarity to find and play but worth the effort if you do. A PlayStation conversion was planned but sadly scrapped during development.

Out for the Nintendo 64 was a new take on an old classic. *Lode Runner* 3D sees you do battle against aliens across five worlds each containing five levels while collecting gold to escape to the next stage. The gameplay is familiar with plenty of platforms, ladders and digging holes for aliens to fall in, however the isometric viewpoint made it all feel very un-*Lode Runner*-like. It was still enjoyable to play… just not as much as the early Eighties original.

Rare had a game out this month in the form of *Conker's Pocket*



[PlayStation] Among the plush packaging and extras was a superb RPG, enhanced from the Mega-CD original.




[Nintendo 64] A classic platform game gets the 3D upgrade treatment but loses a little something along the way.

*Tales* for the Game Boy Color. The top-down puzzle-solving game saw Conker's girlfriend kidnapped and his birthday presents spirited away by the Evil Acorn. So off Conker goes on a quest to liberate both his presents and girlfriend and, to be honest, we wish he hadn't bothered. It was an unusually lackadaisical offering from Rare with reviewers giving it mediocre write-ups.

GBC fans were sent right back to the Seventies with *Super Breakout*. Atari introduced a few variations to freshen things up with four modes of play.

Complimenting the original game was a progressive *Breakout* which saw the wall of bricks slowly descend down the screen. The other two variations feature multiple paddles and balls.

Another GBC release was *Black Bass: Lure Fishing*, an updated version of the original Game Boy game *Super Black Bass* from 1992. Catch four different types of fish from two lakes, just try not to lose your lures. It was graphically sparse no-frills fishing entertainment, fun in small doses and all with the added luxury of not making you stink. *




## MAY 1999

### NINTENDO 64

1 South Park (Acclaim)
2 Star Wars: Rogue Squadron (Nintendo)
3 The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time (Nintendo)
4 WCW/nWo: Revenge (THQ)
5 Virtual Pool (Interplay)

### PLAYSTATION

1 Metal Gear Solid (Konami)
2 Rollcage (Psygnosis)
3 A Bug's Life (Sony)
4 FIFA 99 (Electronic Arts)
5 Populous: The Beginning (Electronic Arts)

### PC

1 Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri (Electronic Arts)
2 Sim City 3000 (Electronic Arts)
3 South Park (Acclaim)
4 The Simpsons: Virtual Springfield (Fox)
5 Premier Manager 99 (Gremlin)

### MUSIC

1 Swear It Again (Westlife)
2 Sweet Like Chocolate (Shanks & Bigfoot)
3 You Needed Me (Boyzone)
4 I Want It That Way (Backstreet Boys)
5 No Scrubs (TLC)

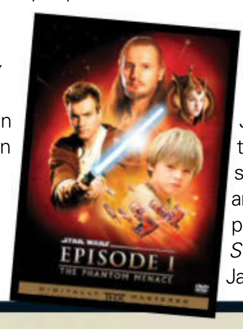
## NEWS MAY 1999

Who lives in a pineapple under the sea? That question was answered on 1 May when *SpongeBob Squarepants* made its debut on American television on the Nickleodeon channel.

2 May saw the passing of actor Oliver Reed. Famous for *Castaway*, among other films, he was as almost as infamous for his hell-raising and alcoholism. He died age 61 of a heart attack during the filming of *Gladiator*.

8 May saw another film legend pass away when Sir Derek Jules Gaspard Ulric Niven van den Bogaerde (aka Dirk Bogarde) had a heart attack. He had suffered a stroke a few years earlier which had left him partially paralysed and confined to a wheelchair. He was 78.

19 May saw the world premiere of the eagerly awaited *Star Wars* prequel film. *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace*, set 32 years before *A New Hope*, it followed the story of Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn and his apprentice, Obi-Wan Kenobi, as they protect Queen Amidala. Along the way they meet a young slave boy called Anakin Skywalker, who is strong with the Force… and so begins the origin story of Darth Vader.




There was much to like in the film with an underused villain Darth Maul and his double-bladed lightsaber, some fantastic lightsaber duels, a fast-paced Pod Race and Samuel L. Jackson as a Jedi Master. However, this was tempered by some awful dialogue and the introduction of possibly the most loathed *Star Wars* character ever, Jar Jar Binks.






# Blue Meanies From Outer Space

"BEATING UP THE BLUE MEANIE DOESN'T BENEFIT ME IN ANY WAY"

#99

» DUANE LATER » VIC-20 » 1981

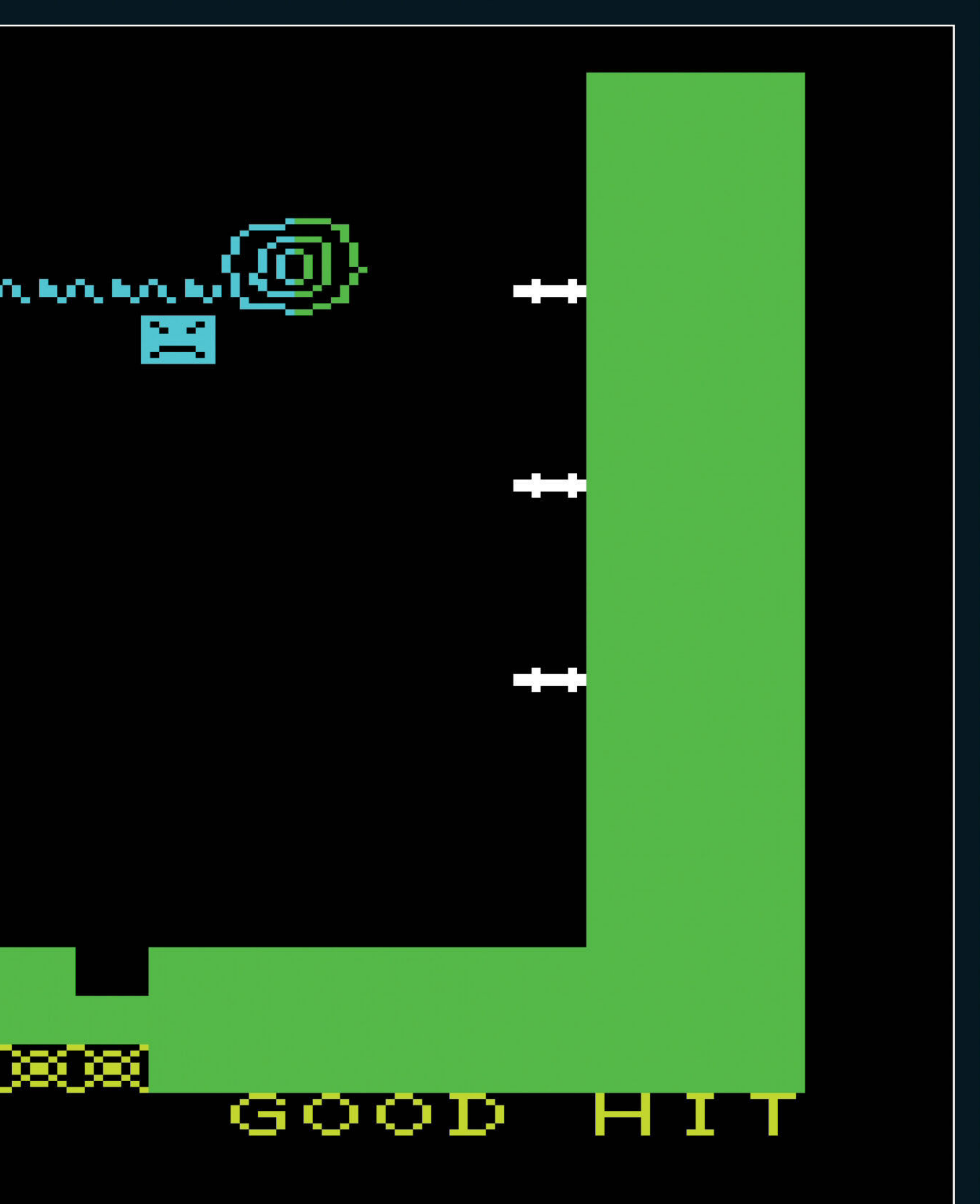
**It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.** 1981 and 1982 was a torrent of exploding testosterone and sulky behaviour in my house but it was also when I switched on my new VIC-20 and *Blue Meanies From Outer Space* exploded on my screen and into my heart. Basic in more ways than one, it nevertheless excited as you tried to shoot with side-mounted lasers at 'Meanies' that descended inexorably down the screen. Lasers burned out quickly meaning often having to change strategy on the fly to stop them reaching the ground and destroying your… well, whatever it was you were supposed to be defending. There was no cutscene, no boss and no ending, save when you finally switched off the 3.5K bread bin because dinner was ready.

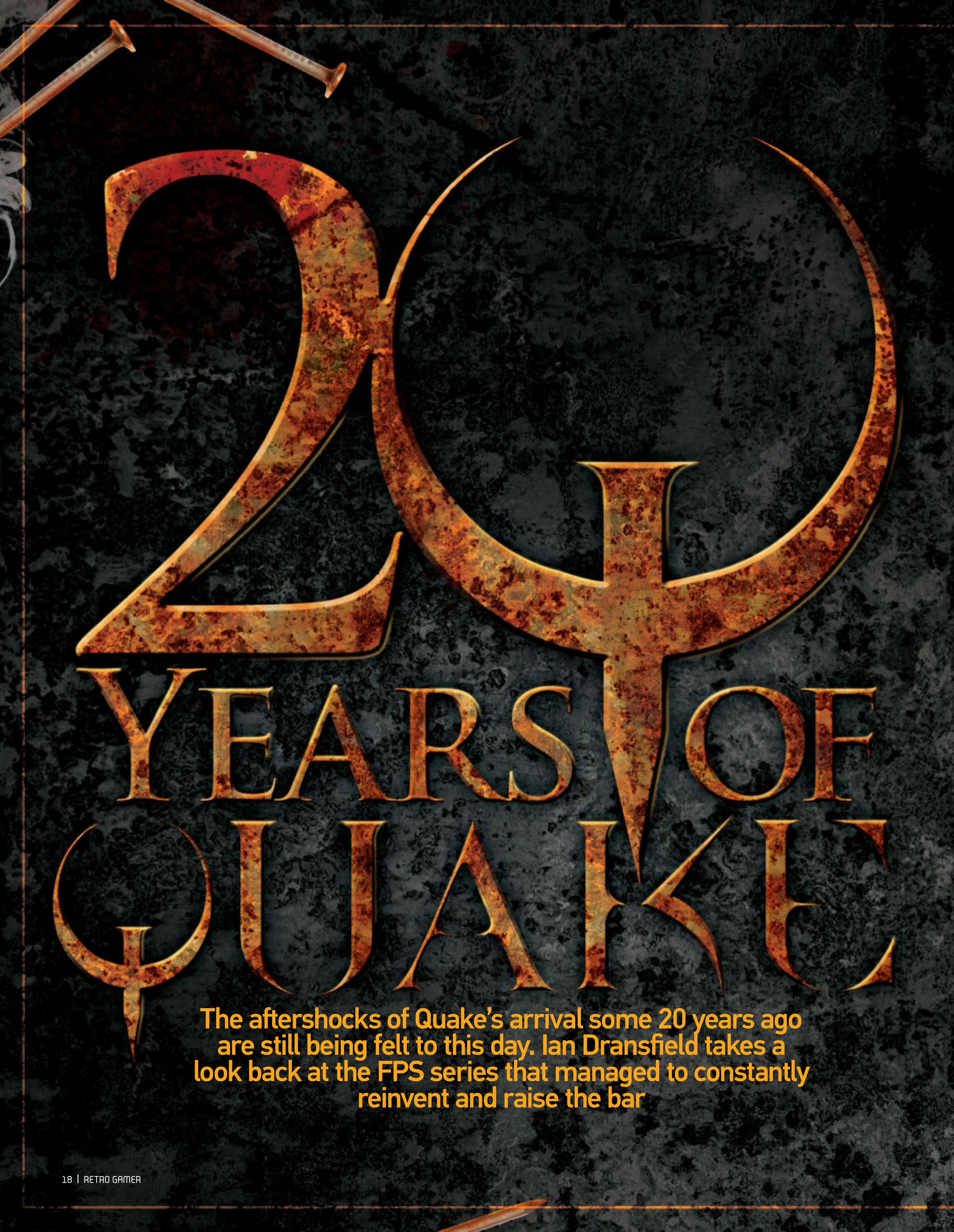
I played it again the other day prior to writing this and the waves of Meanies only served to engender the warmest of feelings which I am sure the original programmer never, ever envisioned. After having a great time playing I stopped and looked at a mirror and just for a second I thought I saw that little boy who used to play staring back with a smile through my tired reflection. That moment is a little part of why we all love this time and these machines and to the Meanies, my undying thanks and appreciation always…

**ALFRED WESSEX**



ENERGY=-50
SCORE= 30


GOOD HIT



# 20 YEARS OF QUAKE

**The aftershocks of Quake's arrival some 20 years ago are still being felt to this day. Ian Dransfield takes a look back at the FPS series that managed to constantly reinvent and raise the bar**

**Did you know *Quake* wouldn't have existed – at least not in the form it did 20 years ago in 1996 – were it not for *The 7th Guest*? Graeme Devine, creator of *The 7th Guest* and designer on *Quake III*, explains:** "I found some emails between John Carmack and I when he was working on *Quake*. We were doing *The 11th Hour* at the time, and he would tell me, 'I'm coming at you in real time!' But at the time doing things like CD audio and TGA [graphics] file loading were mythical secrets. So I shared the source code with him from *7th Guest* that could handle that."

There's a blind spot when it comes to *Quake*'s influence, seemingly because while it standardised some now-common elements of games, it wasn't the *first* to do them. *Quake* might not be spoken about in the same reverent tones you get for Valve's crowbar-toting series, nor might it evoke the same nostalgic joy that *Doom* does, but in many ways it trumps both games simply in respect of what it did for first-person shooters and gaming in general.

The obvious start is what *Quake* looked like – it was fully three-dimensional and could take advantage of 3D accelerator cards, while being released mere months after the sprite-heavy *Duke Nukem 3D, which had 3D in the title*. Pure 3D games had been done before, but it was left to the magic and drive of John Carmack to craft the original *Quake*'s engine into something more. It was *quick*. Yes, it looked nice, it had the lighting effects and all the rest of it – but the speed was important. Without that, *Quake* would have been dead in the water.

Then there's internet play. Again, something that existed before – and, of course one of *Doom*'s biggest, lasting marks on gaming's history – but an area in which id outdid itself, creating a new standard for online play still in use to this day… Admittedly with faster connections. John Romero, cofounder of id, says internet play was a huge factor in *Quake*'s planning. "We had been playing deathmatch for a couple years and were at the forefront of defining what multiplayer meant back then," he explains. "We considered eSports during *Quake*'s development but decided to leave it to others – just allowing others to play with *Quake*'s internet gameplay was what we needed to do."

It worked. *Quake* was a huge hit with online play, and once the *QuakeWorld* update was released… Well, Graeme tells us exactly what it meant for online play: "I remember playing *Quake* multiplayer and thinking the world had changed. That was the game that made internet gaming a thing."

Thirdly, *Quake*'s approach to modding – again, nothing new, but something perfected here – changed the way people approached gaming. Entire careers have risen based on fan-made mods to *Quake*, like David 'Zoid' Kirsch, whose efforts on creating a Capture The Flag mod for *Quake* saw him landing a job at id, eventually moving on to a role at Valve. *Quake*'s rise also came around the same time as the popularisation of the internet, and with that came a lot more sharing.

"We thought that *Quake* was going to be bigger than *Doom* because we aimed for our newest games to be the best," Romero says. "It had more advanced tech, internet multiplayer, and was eminently moddable." This confidence meant the team at id was eager to make *Quake* something special… But that drive couldn't last indefinitely.

"After a year of creating levels and throwing them away as the engine increased in speed and functionality, the team burned out," Romero explains. "We had a big meeting in November 1995 that decided the fate of the company – now that the engine is done, do we work on innovating in game design, or do we just put in FPS weapons and finish it as fast as possible? The ▶

**READERS' COMMENTS**

Having studied medieval history the world of *Quake* really appealed to me with its knights and castles. Love that game, never got into the other ones

**IANPMARKS**




» [PC] This might be an iconic occurrence, but it also means you're in quite a lot of danger.

decision was to just get it done as the team was fried."

Adrian Carmack – no relation to John Carmack – was lead artist on the first three *Quake* titles, as well as a cofounder of id. His experience with the scrapping of a year's worth of work was one that still annoys. "There was a lot of uncertainty early on in *Quake*," he says. "We scrapped the original design, so a year's worth of art was lost – it was for the best, in hindsight, but I hated losing all the art. There was panic near the end of the project about the amount of time it was taking so we all moved into one big room that had been gutted.

"It was kind of cool but at the end of a project everyone gets on each others' nerves, so the big room probably wasn't the best idea. The whole idea was to increase productivity and creativity but


» [Sega Saturn] While a PlayStation version was developed, it never saw release – *Quake* did hit the Saturn, though, in much-diluted form.


» [PC] It's not the busiest online, but you can still manage to comfortably find matches in *Quake*'s online mode.

**READERS' COMMENTS**

Played *Quake* eight-player when I worked at Psygnosis in 1996. I was unbeatable and used to hear other players screaming in frustration. I'm generally not very good at games, but I was killer at this!

**STATION**

I doubt it did either. We were all still friends for the most part, so we still had our fun."

Seven months after the November meeting, on 22 June, 1996, *Quake* was uploaded to the world by Romero, alone in the office, sans fanfare or celebration.

Just under two months later, he was fired from his role at id, accused of not pulling his weight – something Romero denies. "The first year of *Quake's* development was mainly about making the engine," he tells us. "That year I wrote QuakeEd so the designers could experiment with level design.

"In addition to initial *Quake* level design, I also worked on *The Ultimate Doom*, *Master Levels For Doom*, *Hexen*, console ports of various games, and several books and strategy guides. I was very busy, just not spending my time by throwing it away on useless *Quake* design as the engine would not be ready until December. I made more levels than the other designers on the team. Any talk about me working less than others is incredibly untrue."

The drama of Romero leaving the studio he helped to found is one still talked about in gaming circles today, but the fact is id continued on – as did *Quake*. It was out there in the hands of gamers, and it was having an impact. But the situation at id had become precarious, at least according to reports at the time. Advisor to id Todd Hollenshead was brought in as CEO to help tidy up the studio, helping it transition into a more professional outfit.

"The company only had 13 total employees back then," Todd explains. "I was coming in as a new CEO. John Romero has just been fired a couple of months before I was hired. And within six months, we had our business development guy and our only producer leave to join Romero at Ion Storm. John Carmack's right-hand programmer and a genius in his own right, Mike Abrash, decided to move back to Washington. Hell, even our intern quit! I was reading in the gaming press that the company was falling apart and that I would be fired within a year."

Unfortunately for all involved, the truth wasn't too far away from the reports. *Quake* was to be sold via a shareware/CD arrangement, whereby players had the first episode for free on disc and could pay a fee to unlock the rest. The CD had been cracked, and people were getting full *Quake* free of charge. "When the full game was released by our publisher, retailers didn't want the shareware, and tens of thousands of CDs were returned," Todd says. "We ate a lot of inventory, but it was partially a blessing in disguise due to the cracked encryption. We had stacks of unpaid DHL invoices for *Quake* direct sales literally waist high from the floor in our file storage room. The shipping charges were all wrong and no one wanted to take the time to fix it so it stacked up. The retail shareware was a huge mess when I arrived, but we would get it straightened out."

Straightened out it was. After the initial hiccups, *Quake* settled into a rhythm of selling well – and already people knew the FPS had changed forever. "No one else in the industry had anything close to what [John] Carmack and Michael Abrash had built with the *Quake* engine and everyone wanted it," Todd says. This didn't just bode well for players – id Software itself would benefit from this attention. "The Mission Packs for *Quake* were looking good and every publisher wanted the distribution deal for them," Todd explains. "They also wanted whatever we did next."

**What id did next ended up being *Quake II*, released in 1997 and a surprisingly different game to the original. Titles like '*Strogg*', '*Lock And Load*' and even just '*Load*' were toyed with in the** early days, such a different proposition it was, but the team stuck with *Quake II* (in part because it was difficult to find a name that hadn't already been trademarked) – and another legend was born. "It was a conscious decision [to change *Quake II*'s direction] and controversial inside the company," Todd remembers. "We weren't happy with the *Quake* story. Romero was gone, so there was no one left to defend it. Kevin Cloud headed up *Quake 2* and he wanted to make it story-driven."

So it was that *Quake II* introduced the struggle between the humans and a biomechanical alien race known as the Strogg. While certainly not *heavy* on story per se, the game introduced a lot more narrative into many elements of the game, giving the player motivation as to why they were gunning down the legions of alien bastards in their way. The levels where fellow marines were literally being ground into a paste stuck with many of us.

Released just 18 months after the original, *Quake II* saw the debut of a new engine – *id Tech 2* – which went on to form the basis of many games in the late Nineties and early Noughties. It upped the graphical fidelity to the point where people, on first seeing the game at E3 1997, genuinely didn't believe it was running in real time on hardware people had in their homes. Technically speaking, *Quake II* refined rather than made huge steps, a la the

# THE BEST OF QUAKE'S ARMOURY



### NAIL GUN
APPEARED IN: *Quake, Q4*

■ Single-handedly summing up *Quake*'s brutality, the nail gun was a machine gun replacement firing… Well, nine-inch nails.



### SUPER SHOTGUN
APPEARED IN: *Quake, Q2*

■ The shotty is a series mainstay, but the Super Shotgun only appears twice – and it's a close-range *god*.



### LIGHTNING GUN
APPEARED IN: *Quake, Q3, Q4*

■ Just when you think things are relatively normal, along comes a gun that fires lightning. Because why not, eh?



### BFG10K
APPEARED IN: *Quake II, Q3*

■ Getting a dose of *Doom* in our *Quake*, the BFG10K was the 'super weapon' that returned for a couple of *Quake* games.



### HYPER BLASTER
APPEARED IN: Quake II, Q4

■ Specifically the version in *Quake II*: a fast-firing weapon that you should never really stop firing.



### RAIL GUN
APPEARED IN: Quake II, Q3, Q4

■ Fairly decent in the second game, the Rail Gun became iconic as of *Quake III* due to it being the closest *Q3* had to a sniper rifle.



### ROCKET LAUNCHER
APPEARED IN: All

■ *Quake* just wouldn't be *Quake* without a rocket launcher and, of course, all the rocket jumping that brings with it.



### GRENADE LAUNCHER
APPEARED IN: All

■ While it might have been routine by the fourth game, in the original *Quake* this weapon was a technical achievement.



» [PlayStation] *Quake II* on PSone was… alright, all things considered. Not a patch on the original, of course, but it worked.


» [PC] Here we have the character named, at least in the game's files, as 'bitch'. Oh id, you silly billys.

> "I WAS READING IN THE PRESS THAT THE COMPANY WAS FALLING APART AND THAT I WOULD BE FIRED"
>
> Todd Hollenshead

## QUAKECON

Not many games have an entire convention named after it…

Starting in 1996 and still running to this day, QuakeCon is the annual meetup of fans of the *Quake* series – and *Doom*, and anything id Software has made, *and* more recently Bethesda/Zenimax – but it didn't even start out as an official event. Organised by a few fans on the #quakecon IRC channel, the 1996 gathering started with around 30 people and grew to about 100 after a couple of days. Best of all, though, id Software showed up unexpectedly on the last day, with John Carmack setting a bit of a precedent by holding a talk with fans for just under an hour; this later became Carmack's keynote speech he would hold every year.

By 1999, id was actively organising the event, after having acted as sponsor for the previous few years, and began shifting the event into bigger locations, with the crowds growing accordingly. Rather than just a corporate benefit, id's involvement also meant, for example, people could get their hands on games before they had been released – like *Quake III* in 1999, which hadn't been shown off publicly.

More recently QuakeCon has become another date on the calendar for both the gaming public *and* press, with new titles shown off not just from id/Bethesda, but a host of other publishers too. The organic growth of the convention has helped it to keep some level of credibility in the gaming community – the sort of thing most publishers would happily pay top dollar to inject into their own events.

Attendance has grown to around the 10,000 mark, and while John Carmack – and numerous others – have left id, the keynotes and stage presentations continue unabated. Not bad for something that came from a few fans arranging a 30-person meetup.



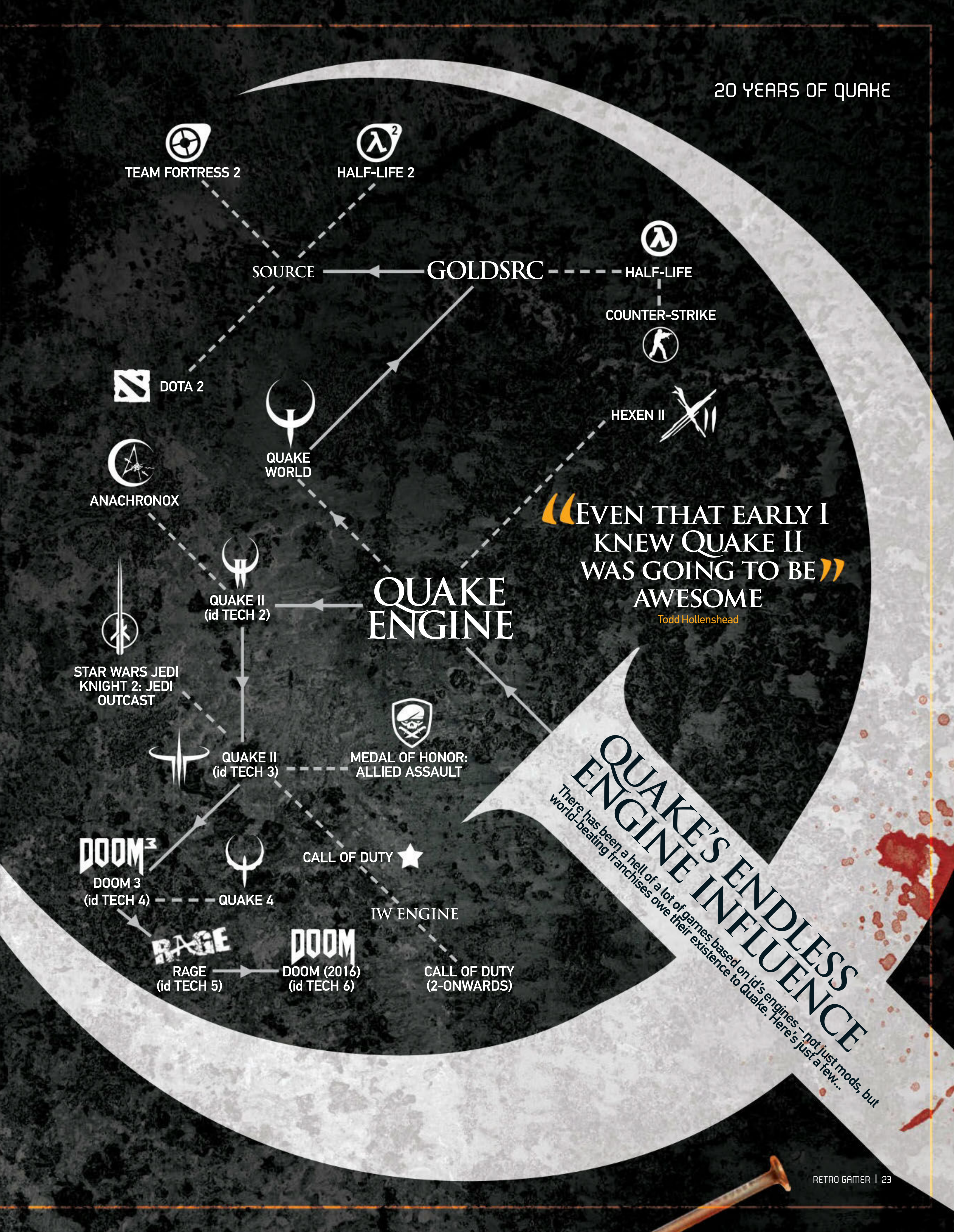
x3 Images © QuakeCon

first game, but it was another hugely influential title in the pantheon of first-person shooters.

When Todd arrived at id the team was already busy making *Quake II* – which had been completely redesigned after Romero's departure. "Even that early I knew *Quake II* was going to be awesome," he tells us. "Everyone at id knew it. So while there were a bunch of problems we had to deal with and important people we had to replace, we had the best programmer, the best artists, and talented designers. We were excited about showing *Quake II* at E3 and blowing everyone away once again."

The loss of one of id's founders had been felt, according to Adrian. "Romero leaving definitely changed things," he says. "The team still worked well together, but we missed his creativity and his humour." And while things did continue on, there were more staff losses to follow – some joining Ion Storm, American McGee, Mike Abrash and Sandy Peterson moving on – all leaving zero designers from the *Doom* era, and just Tim Willits (still at id to this day) from the first *Quake*. There's a reason *Quake II* was a very different game – it was an almost entirely different team. But with that new team came a liberation that wasn't there with the first game, as Todd explains. "*Quake II* development was about doing all the things that the artists and designers wanted to do in *Quake* but couldn't because of the rawness of the tech," he says. "Plus, [John] Carmack contributed his genius when we added a hardware-accelerated version that really made *Quake II* look superior to anything else in the market."

**Romero, for his part, admitted he is a fan of the sequel. "I loved *Quake 2*," he elates. "I played and finished it right after its release and it was a lot of fun." But he maintains the approach that the series would** have changed, had he still been at id. "We would have made *Quake II* and then moved onto a brand-new game, just as had been our pattern for years. We would not have been making endless sequels of our previous games. There wouldn't




# QUAKE'S ENDLESS ENGINE INFLUENCE

There has been a hell of a lot of games based on id's engines – not just mods, but world-beating franchises owe their existence to Quake. Here's just a few…

> "Even that early I knew Quake II was going to be awesome"
>
> Todd Hollenshead



have been a *Quake III*, but there may have been a deathmatch-only videogame that looked and played differently."

Adrian, meanwhile, chooses the second game as his favourite in the series, though not necessarily meaning it's the best. "My favourite was *Quake II*, because it was different and a cohesive project," he explains. "It was going to be our best project but we got in the way of ourselves. There's a lot more there – what could have been had we all worked together. But it was still a great project!" Though the change in direction wasn't felt quite as much by the artist as it was by players. "The fact that each project was different was good for creativity," he says. "But they weren't that different. They were still sci-fi future worlds and first-person shooters. I once told a good friend, 'If I have to draw one more f**king metal f**king wall I'm going to vomit!"

**READERS' COMMENTS**

*Quake II* for me. Never got into *Quake* that much, preferred the simplicity blasting fun of *Doom*. *Quake II* was great multiplayer fun though.

**KIWIMIKE**

**While a lot of the memories around *Quake II* focus on its story-led single-player mode – which is still fantastic fun, endlessly inventive and surprising even in** contemporary terms – there was that robust, popular and *damn* good multiplayer section, which had made improvements to make it easier for us all to go online and get a-gibbin'. It was clearly the direction John Carmack wanted to take things in, and after *Quake II*'s release he started planning with the team at id for something different for a sequel.

"There was a great deal of pressure to perform with *Quake*, since it was the follow up to *Doom 2*," Adrian explains of *Quake*'s ever-changing forms.

> "My favourite was Quake II because it was a different and cohesive project"
> Adrian Carmack

## TEN ESSENTIAL QUAKE MODS

### TEAM FORTRESS

■ It's easy to forget Valve's hat-selling classic of online class-based teamplay began as a mod for the original *Quake*. Ostensibly the same game played today, *Team Fortress* had the core features that still make it such fun to play – teams, classes, turrets, spanners, everything you'd hope for. While it made the jump to the *Half-Life* engine for *Team Fortress Classic*, the original does still have a dedicated playerbase – it might be 20 years old, but it's not too difficult to find a game wherever you are in the world.



### QUAKE RALLY

■ In the early days of large-scale modding, people found it easier to stick with the general theme that was laid out in front of them. It's no surprise that most of *Quake*'s mods were first-person shooters. So entrenched were people in these genres that when *Quake Rally* popped up on the scene, people didn't believe it had been done – a rally game, made in the *Quake* engine. Scratch that – a *good* rally game made in the *Quake* engine. *Quake III Rally* carries the torch today, but the original was mindblowing.



### THREEWAVE CTF

■ The original *Quake* launched without a Capture The Flag mode. Just let that sink in for a minute. The game that made online gaming what it is today didn't come with one of its most popular modes. This was fixed quick smart by one David 'Zoid' Kirsch, who released the first CTF mod for *Quake* not long after the game itself released in 1996. Kirsch actually went on to work for id, designing CTF modes for its future *Quake* releases, and he now works at Valve. Not a bad career for someone starting out as a modder.



### MALICE

■ One of the better mods for *Quake*, *Malice* was all-but a total conversion, bringing new levels, weapons, characters and even voice acting to the game. It might not hold up these days compared to id's masterpiece, but *Malice* offers a snapshot of gaming in 1997: making those tentative steps into fast-paced 3D worlds; taking advantage of increased storage space for cinematics and voiceovers. While more of a curio than anything today, it's a good indicator of how gaming was back then in the late Nineties.



### ACTION QUAKE II

■ *Quake II* was a bit too gritty and sci-fi for some – but where most who took issue complained, some got together and crafted a mod that made everything a less gritty and a lot more like the action films of the Nineties. *Action Quake II* still has an audience to this day, and with good reason: it's fantastic fun. Ludicrously quick and over-the-top, *Action Quake II* features more realism (though not *realistic*) damage, locales and weapons, and has gone down in history as one of *Quake 2*'s best ever mods.



"We didn't feel that kind of pressure with the rest of the series. We knew the fans would be upset that the weapons and gameplay changed after our experience with *Quake*, but within six months they would love it and consider it a classic!"

While Romero would have done it differently, he was busy at Ion Storm with *Daikatana*. John Carmack did what he wanted to do – first in the shape of *Quake III: Arena*, a multiplayer-focused shooter way ahead of its time, then *Quake III: Team Arena* and, eventually in 2008, *Quake Live* – a modified, pure multiplayer version of *Quake III*. Fans of multiplayer gaming are sure to be happy that Romero wasn't in charge of id's decision-making at that point, to be fair.

If you'd said that back in 1999 at the time of *Quake III*'s release, though, you'd have been laughed out of whatever forum you were posting in. People tend to want more of the same – *Quake III* was not more of the same. While it could be played in single-player, with bots patrolling each arena for you to battle with, it wasn't a *traditional* single-player mode. More an offline training mode before jumping in with the action online.

And what action it was (and still is) – stripped down to the core tenets of what make a good online shooter, *Quake III* was fast and fluid, full of the kinds of maps that are – loathe as we are to say it – easy to pick up, but difficult to master. Extensive prerelease testing was conducted to help balance everything out and updates were implemented frequently after the game's release. It's always an arguable point and one riddled with individual opinions, but *Quake III: Arena* is up there with the best multiplayer shooters of all time, even if Adrian tells us it was his least favourite of the series to work on, as it "narrowed our fanbase". "I didn't like working on *Quake III* much," he remembers. "And it seemed like everyone else felt the same way."

Nevertheless, part of the acclaim has to come down to how focused the id team was by this point – the disarray of the original *Quake*'s release now a distant memory and the team somewhat more settled than it had been previously, plans progressed in a more steady fashion. "The plan was always multiplayer," Graeme explains. "We wanted a multiplayer-only online game that was super balanced and worked on modems." ▶

» [PC] Standard *Quake II* actually has a healthier online audience than some games released in 2015.


» [PC] Okay, so playing offline isn't the best way to play *Quake III* – but the bots are actually pretty good.

**READERS' COMMENTS**

*Quake II* is the best for me. A fantastic Christmas present that set up the festive season perfectly. Played it through 'til the end and loved every minute. The 3dfx graphics were fantastic

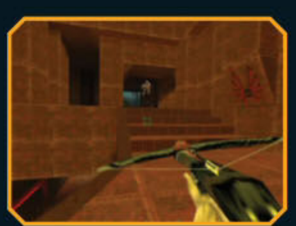
**SLACEY1070**


» [PS2] *Quake III*'s run on PS2 was hamstrung by a lack of online, but four-player splitscreen did a good job of making up for the loss.

**The Quake series has sired countless mods. We pick out the best of the massive library**

### CHAOS DEATHMATCH

■ This mod tweaked the *Quake II* formula hugely, adding weapons, like crossbows, and offering new maps and features like faking your own death, or kamikazeing into battle. Living up to its name admirably, *Chaos* managed to carve itself a niche on the *Quake II* mod scene thanks to an extreme level of customisability on the server end of things – countless different game types were created by users, and it meant you never really knew what to expect from a *Chaos* match. Apart from crossbows, obviously.



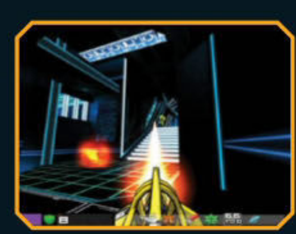
### ROCKET ARENA

■ Possibly the only major mod to have been released for every single *Quake* game, *Rocket Arena* has earned its status as one of the best mods out there. It's simple enough: players start in an arena with identical resources, and maps feature no pickups. Last person standing, wins. This means no rushing for the rail gun, no camping at respawn points and no way to get your health back once you've been battered. So popular is *Rocket Arena*, in fact, that one of its modes – Clan Arena – is included as standard in *Quake Live*.



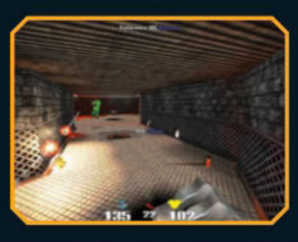
### WARSOW

■ Releasing in 2012 after over half a decade in development, you would expect *Warsow* to be a latter quake mod. But no – it actually runs off a heavily modified *Quake II* engine, which is incredible when you see how *Warsow* looks and runs. Emphasising athleticism over shooting, the game is full of trick jumps, dodging and many other speedy techniques that reward the fleet-footed over the static snipers. *Warsow* can be picked up for free from the likes of GOG, with a Steam version coming, and it's well worth a go.



### CHALLENGE PROMODE ARENA

■ It's always a badge of honour when a mod is picked up in an official capacity, but when your mod becomes the *standard* used in professional, competitive *Quake III* play, you know you're onto something pretty big. *CPMA* features altered physics, allowing midair control, rebalanced weapons, changed jumping techniques, customisable HUDs and much more – it's easy to see why professional *Quake* players would find it appealing.



### TREMULOUS

■ An ambitious, ongoing and bloody good fun *Quake III* mod, *Tremulous* mixes first-person shooting with elements of real-time strategy, pitting humans against aliens. Base building and defence is common on both sides, but while the humans play a more generic, shooty-bang way, the aliens rely on agility, melee attacks and – once they've racked up enough kills – the ability to evolve into more powerful creatures. You can see elements of *Tremulous* popping up in games like *Evolve* and the 2016 version of *Doom*.






# GREAT QUAKE MOMENTS

**A series as prestigious as Quake naturally has highlights that will stay with you forever…**

## QUAKE



### GRABBING THE GRENADE LAUNCHER

■ Early in the game you're given your first go with high explosives. Projectiles arced through the air, bounced off walls and could be aimed around corners, it was revelatory for its time.



### BAGGING YOUR FIRST BOSS

■ It was something of a surprise when you realise shooting the first boss didn't work. Mixing in a bit of puzzling with the destruction makes for one of *Quake*'s best moments.



### QUAD DAMAGE

■ *Doom* had Berserk and *Quake* had Quad Damage – we know which we prefer. *Quake*'s power-up saw every weapon you had deal four times its base damage, causing any enemies hit while in this state to explode in a shower of bloody chunks.

## QUAKE II



### FINDING A NEW FRIEND

■ Just when you thought you had everything figured out, *Quake II* drops a bombshell – well, the Rail Gun – on you: and it's amazing. You suddenly find yourself with this powerful, versatile and thoroughly useful new weapon.



### YOU'VE GOT STORY IN MY QUAKE

■ The second game had a clear focus on story. As such, when you saw scenes like your fellow marines being brutally experimented on by the Strogg, you cared… At least a little bit more.



### CRACKING MAKRON

■ *Quake II*'s last boss isn't difficult, but he does provide a simple, satisfying end to the game. Upon defeat the Strogg warlord ends up split in two, writhing on the floor in agony.

## QUAKE III



### I'M FLYING!

■ You quickly realise there are a lot of jump pads around in *Quake III*, but it might not immediately dawn on all players that aerial combat is a big element of the game. Learning how to quickly adjust your weapon mid-flight, raining down the fury from above, is key to success.




### PLAYING ONLINE YEARS LATER

■ It's testament to *Quake III*'s forward-thinking nature that you can still load it up today and find a game with little-to-no trouble. Sure, the competition has honed its skills over the years, but you can still have a hell of a lot of fun.

## QUAKE 4

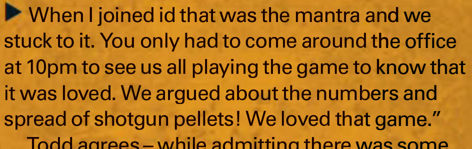
### THE STROGG HEALTH SERVICE

■ *Quake 4* is not a game of many memorable moments, but its main one stands out as one of the best in the whole series. A gruesome rollercoaster of surgery, players are restrained as they go through the process of 'Stroggification'.



### FINISHING THE GAME

■ Once you're done with *Quake 4*, you're done – there's no pull to go back, no real draw to sit through the meandering, endless scenes of macho bullshit dialogue. It's not a bad game, it's just not very good – and finishing it off is a relief more than anything.



▶ When I joined id that was the mantra and we stuck to it. You only had to come around the office at 10pm to see us all playing the game to know that it was loved. We argued about the numbers and spread of shotgun pellets! We loved that game."

Todd agrees – while admitting there was some minor strife internally because, once again, this was nothing like what had come before in the series. "*Quake III* was another internal battle as we struggled to justify calling it '*Quake*'," he says. "Even though it basically had nothing to do with the story from the first two… But *Quake III: Arena* is the game I have spent more time playing than any other game. Tourney 6 CTF (Xaero's map) is my all-time favourite. We used to play for the Master Of The Universe (MOTU) 2vs2 Capture The Flag every Friday. Tim Willits made that map one day on a bet with me that he couldn't make a fun *Quake III* map in an hour. I lost that bet badly!"

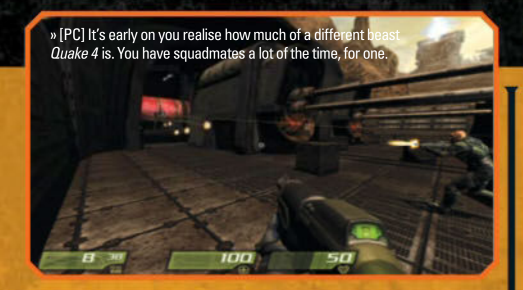
**While this positivity had taken over some of the office, the public was still lukewarm on *Quake 3*.** At least until *Q3Test1* – the game's first beta version – was released in early 1999, followed shortly after with *Q3Test2*. "People still play those versions today," Graeme says, explaining how id soon realised it had kickstarted a bit of a revolution – again – in online play. "John and I would walk around QuakeCon looking at people playing and I think we knew something had changed in the world. We didn't know then




» [PC] Online play is still up, running and busy even to this day – a testament to *Quake III*'s quality.

**READERS' COMMENTS**

*Quake III* was my introduction to multiplayer on the 33k modem Dreamcast, expensive but worth it!
**SSCOTT**


» [PC] It's early on you realise how much of a different beast *Quake 4* is. You have squadmates a lot of the time, for one.

» [PC] Complaints that *Quake 4* was just *Doom 3* in different clothes were well-founded.

» [PC] Some of the enemy designs were cool in *Quake 4*, and the odd boss battle got the heart racing.

that the competitive online play would become *the* thing, but in retrospect *Quake III* was there at the beginning to kick start eSports."

After two huge games, both rewriting the rulebook on what a FPS could be, the pressure at id Software was huge from everywhere: the press, the fans, the casual players drawn in by the series' reputation. But the *real* pressure actually came from inside the company. "The pressure came from us as much as anyone," Graeme remembers. "We wanted to make the game fantastic for everyone out there. We didn't have the same internet forums we have today so there was no Reddit to go read and get more worked up about; there were the comments on Planet Quake and Blues News and that was the most direct – the only – form of feedback we got."

Todd echoes Graeme. "The greatest pressure was what we put on ourselves and each other," he says. "We fully intended and expected to set the gaming world on fire with every release in the *Quake* series, and we accomplished that with every one of them. Yeah the story shifts were kind of crazy, but John Carmack's attitude was that the story wasn't important. The rest of the team wasn't always in agreement with him, but the success of *Quake III: Arena* seemed to prove him right."

Was it all perfect? No, of course not – some never got beyond the fact this was a multiplayer-only shooter, and in a world of 56k modems in the home (at best) it was understandable. Romero might have told us he found *Quake III* to be "a really well-done deathmatch arena game", but the public at large wasn't ready for such a big, mainstream series going into a niche like this. Did that make *Quake III* a failure? Far from it.

"By the numbers, I'm sure *Quake III* was the best-performing game for id," Todd explains. "I will hear the boos across the internet as people read this, but it was probably due in part to the fact that it was the first game we made a serious attempt to stop piracy with the CD Key system. But more important than CD Keys, for me (and I think many others), *Quake III* is still the ultimate pure skill-based FPS. Nothing tops it to this day. I see many elements of the *Quake III*-style twitch gameplay now in the *Call Of Duty* series. *Quake Live* continues to attract a nice audience. The fun hasn't worn off... Calling in a massive bombing strike is awesomely fun. But a frag in *Quake III* is still as rewarding as ever and you know there's nothing 'cheap' about it."

Then, in 2005, something different happened – but for once it wasn't different in the way *Quake* fans wanted it to be. This was *Quake 4*: pitched by mega-publisher Activision and handed to the capable team at Raven, it ended up being a hugely missed opportunity and a the only *Quake* game in the series to have become much worse with age. "*Quake 4* is where the brand went off the rails," Romero explains. "*Doom* and *Quake* were mashed up together - looking at *Quake 4* you can't tell whether you're in a *Doom* game or a *Quake* game. "There was biomechanical stuff that belonged in *Doom*. It was dark like *Doom 3*. It didn't feel like *Quake*. Having said that, none of [the later] *Quakes* did since the original was based on H.P. Lovecraft and alternate dimensions. That's the pillar that held *Quake* together."

*Quake 4* returned to the story of *Quake II*, bringing much more of a coherent fiction to the universe of a human/Strogg conflict. It did this with a lot of lengthy exposition and unskippable dialogue sequences, but it had redeeming features – namely the Stroggification scene, which we cover in the Great Quake Moments boxout. Beyond that, though? Well, it wasn't good. There are alternate views, of course – it was more of a console shooter, aimed at the nascent Xbox 360 market and attempting to create a new market for the FPS (which Activision would end up doing in 2007 with *Call Of Duty 4* anyway). There's nothing really wrong with the idea behind *Quake 4*, aside from it being more than a reskinned *Doom 3*, and Raven is a studio with a lot of good titles behind it. But *Quake 4* is excruciatingly dull, forgettable and the one game in the series nobody we spoke to had anything lengthy or positive to say about it.

**YOUR FAVOURITE QUAKE GAME**

QUAKE- **44%**
QUAKE II - **32%**
QUAKE III - **24%**
QUAKE 4 - **0%**

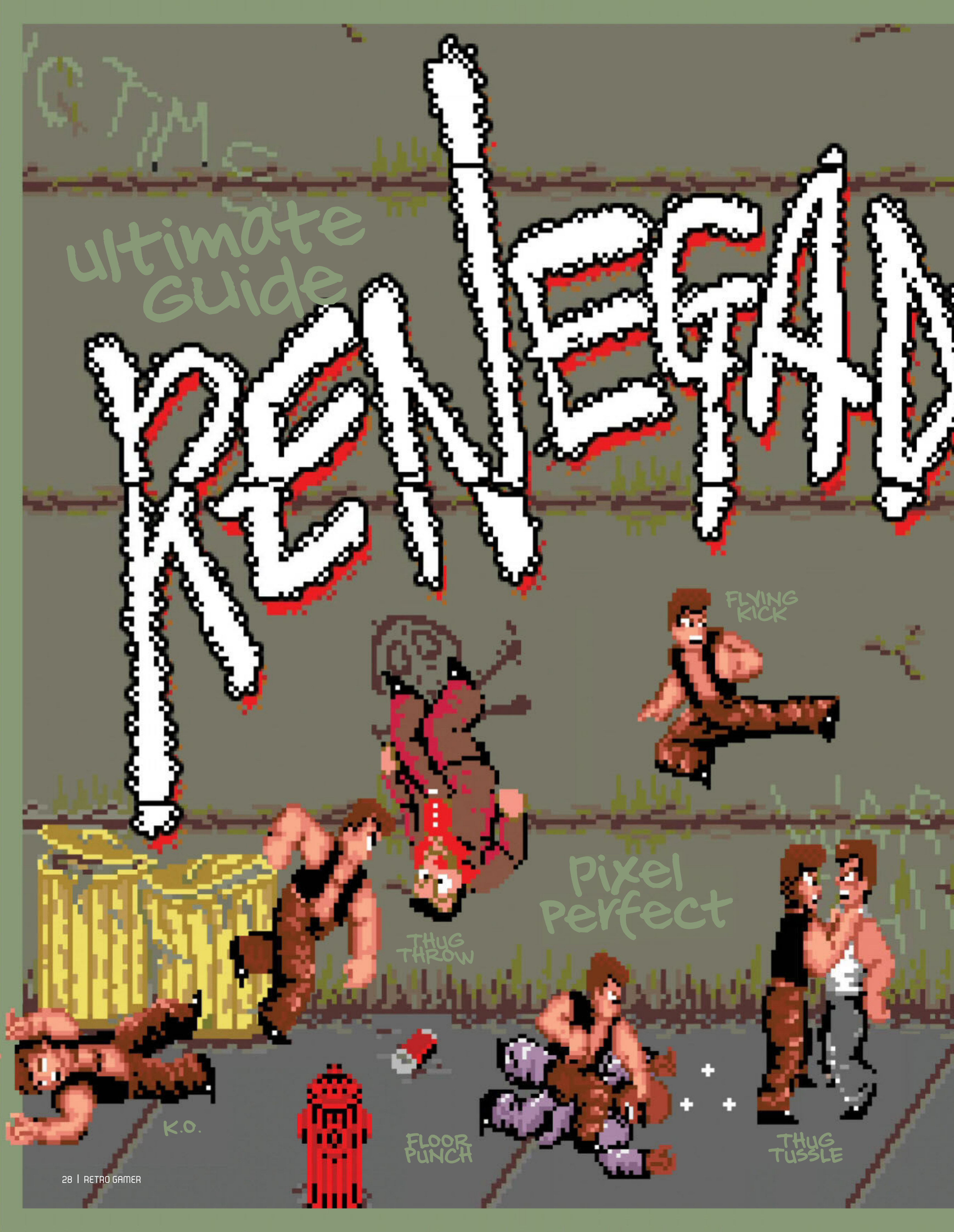
> "I'M SURE QUAKE 3 WAS THE BEST-PERFORMING GAME FOR ID"
> Todd Hollenshead

Since *Quake 4*, there hasn't been much rumbling about the next title in the series. *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* popped up in 2007, and the Splash Damage-made online shooter was excellent in its own right. But the core *Quake* series? Nary a whisper. id has been busy working on the latest *Doom* for some time, while the studio itself has undergone even more changes, with the last of the founding members, John Carmack, leaving for Oculus in 2013 in order to follow his VR dream.

Things have changed a huge amount over the 20 years since *Quake* was first dropped on the public. This is the point where we would say, 'Things are unrecognisable compared to the landscape back then', but in *Quake*'s case that isn't true: this was the series that *made* the landscape look how it does today. Even if *Quake* wasn't always first to the party, it tore up the dancefloor each and every time – barring the fourth game, of course.

While the blind spot might still be there in popular discourse, our eyes are open: *Quake*, as a series, made gaming what it is today. There are other influential titles, but to say *Quake*, *Quake II* and *Quake III* are anything other than in the top five is surely folly. "For an instant in time we had the focus, the drive, and the desire to go change the world," Graeme tells us. "And we did just that." ✱




ultimate Guide
RENEGADE
Pixel Perfect
FLYING KICK
THUG THROW
K.O.
FLOOR PUNCH
THUG TUSSLE



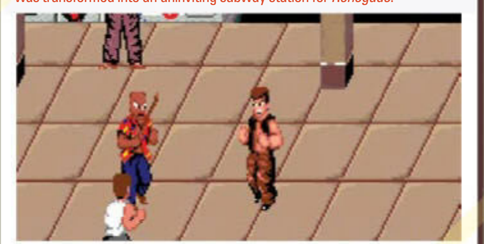

**When it comes to arcade brawlers Renegade was the original heavyweight in the field. Martyn Carroll keeps his head down as he revisits the game's grimy underworld in search of truth and street justice.**

**There are few types of game more satisfying than vigilante-themed beat-'em-ups. You know the score: no-good gangs have taken over the city and the streets are no longer safe. When they're not busy tagging walls** and driving down property values, gang members are provoking good people by targeting their loved-ones. The fools! Classic games like *Double Dragon*, *Final Fight* and *Streets Of Rage* have shown exactly what happens when you rattle citizens in possession of above-average martial arts skills.

*Renegade* was the first game to really popularise the street justice theme. You played a nameless hero – the 'Renegade' of the title – who had to fight his way through four seedy stages, defeating the gangs in each. Once you'd defeated the final boss your girlfriend would emerge, presumably from capture – the game didn't state that she'd been kidnapped but that was the implication, the gangs were there to be wasted regardless.

It's well-known that *Renegade* was a reskin of the 1986 game *Nekketsu Kouha Kunio-kun*, the first of Technos' long-running *Kunio-kun* series. The Japanese original saw you defending your brother from menacing school bullies and low-level gang members. To better appeal to the Western audience Technos restyled many of the game's graphics to give it a harder, sleazier edge. For his inspiration the game's director Yoshihisa Kishimoto studied the cult 1979 American film *The Warriors* – and he found pretty much everything he needed in the opening credits sequence where the

» [Arcade] The rather quaint train station level in *Nekketsu Kouha Kunio-kun* was transformed into an uninviting subway station for *Renegade*.



SUITED THUG

HAIWIAN THUG

VAN HALEN THUG

CHAIN MAID

WHITE VEST THUG

BIKER




» [Arcade] It's best to dismount bikers using a flying kick, although if you're feeling cocky you can do it with a running punch and even a back kick.



» [Arcade] When finishing off an enemy just make sure no-one comes to their aid!

» [Arcade] Every fighting game has a powerful move you can spam and in *Renegade* it's the lethal back kick.

various gangs travel on the NYC subway to a gathering in the Bronx.

The hero's aikido gear was swapped for a black waistcoat, effectively making him one of the Warriors from the film, and the pleasant train station from the Japanese version's opening stage became a graffiti-strewn subway. The enemies, meanwhile, became ruthless gang members wearing distinctive 'colours'. These changes were epitomised in the alley stage where conservatively-dressed ladies, who'd whack you around the head with their handbags were replaced, by neon-haired ravers wearing low-cut tops and swinging spikey balls! Can you dig it?

Thankfully Technos chose not to make any changes to the progressive fighting gameplay. Each stage was typically populated by six thugs and their boss, who'd come into play when you'd thinned out their gang. To defeat them you had nine brutal moves at your disposal, ranging from punches and kicks to shoulder throws and groin attacks. Control was provided by an eight-way joystick and three buttons – jump, left attack and right attack. Having the moves change depending on which way you were facing was an interesting decision and took some getting used to.

Being able to move freely around the stage and having such an expansive move list was a big deal at the time and the game paved the way for Technos' next title, the worldwide smash *Double Dragon*. That's not to say *Renegade* was superseded however. *Double Dragon* may have added the genre staples of larger stages, usable weapons and coin-op play, but *Renegade* retained some of its own unique charms. The fact that each stage was like an arena meant that you could move strategically around and pick your battles. In addition to this, the run move added a wrestling element as you could dash from one side of the 'ring' to the other, toppling enemies like skittles.

# BOSS RUSH

The four thugs who stand in your way – and how to remove them

### SUBWAY BOSS

Thanks to his waistcoat and headband, the first boss is one of the game's most stylish adversaries – in the Seventies, at least. His clichéd catchphrase is, "Get lost punk!"

**HOW TO BEAT HIM:** Don't get too close or else he'll grab you. Instead, lure him to the edge of the platform and stun him with a back kick before flinging him to his doom.

### PIER BOSS

With his mohawk and mesh vest the leader of the biker boys is a menacing sight. He's also pretty handy with an effective spin kick move. His hopeless catchphrase is, "Beat it scum!"

**HOW TO BEAT HIM:** As with the first boss there's little point in wearing him down. Just take him for a long walk off the short pier as soon as he enters the fray.

### ALLEY BOSS

This back alley madam was christened 'Big Bad Bertha' in Ocean's home versions and that name suits her perfectly. Her laughable catchphrase is, "Given up already?"

**HOW TO BEAT HER:** Bertha's signature move is a dash so hit her with a jump kick as she runs at you. A back kick is even better as she can't evade that.

### FINAL BOSS



Mr Big Boss deserves a beat down for bringing a gun to a fist fight. He has no catchphrase, preferring to let his pistol do the talking. You must defeat him to get to your girl.

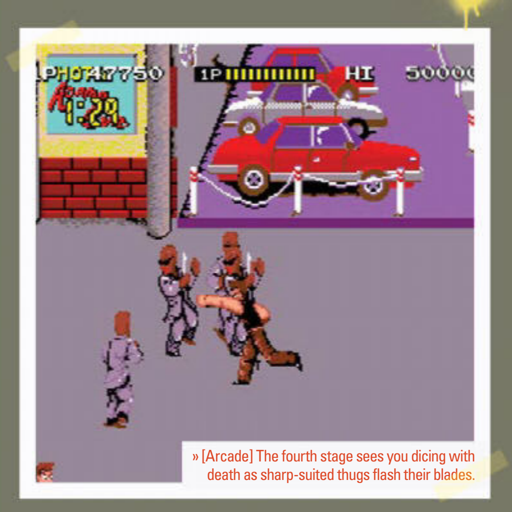
**HOW TO BEAT HIM:** Take out his henchman using running punches, then keep moving up to avoid his fire. Use punches and the occasional knee when he's in range.

» [Arcade] The final boss is a tense encounter as there's not much room to evade his gunfire.

**R*enegade* debuted in arcades in late 1986 and was published by Taito. Ocean Software had already forged a** relationship with Taito, acquiring the licenses to *The Legend Of Kage*, *Arkanoid* and *Slap Fight*, so home computer versions of *Renegade* were predictable additions to the firm's slate. The game was an easy sell thanks to its violent premise, with the press revelling over the wince-making move list. "*Renegade* is so violent it makes *Rambo* look like Adrian Mole," yakked *Sinclair User*. A memorable Bob Wakelin illustration, showing *Renegade*'s hero with his foot wedged in a thug's windpipe, ensured that the game's advertising hit home.

Ocean's initial 8-bit versions for the Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and Commodore 64 were generally excellent, even if the original's three fire buttons caused a few conversion headaches. The Z80 versions in particular were highly praised and these days it's generally held that they match and perhaps even surpass the gameplay of the coin-op. The later versions for Atari ST and Amiga looked closer to the coin-op but played much worse than the 8-bit releases.

The NES version deserves special mention because, in typical fashion, it added a few unique twists to the game. The opening subway brawl, for instance, continued inside the train and then spilt out onto another platform. Later on it featured a motorbike chase where you had to kick rivals off their bikes! The Apple II and Sega Master System versions were both based on the NES game – see the Conversion Capers box out for a round-up of every home version.



» [Arcade] The fourth stage sees you dicing with death as sharp-suited thugs flash their blades.

# STREET SCENE

**The brief story behind Your Sinclair's Renegade review art**

The Spectrum version of *Renegade* received the coveted 'Megagame' award in the October 1987 issue of *Your Sinclair*, and the review was accompanied by a illustration depicting various scenes from the game. The artist's name was Paul Shorrock. "It was one of my very early works," he says. "I am still working as a freelance illustrator. I don't have the artwork any longer. It's not something I hung on my wall. In fact, I'm not even sure that the client returned the artwork." Paul reveals that he didn't own a Spectrum and never even saw the game in action. "It wasn't necessary for me to see it to illustrate the storyline. I obviously had a bit of fun with it – I've just spotted a silhouette I'm surprised I got away with! It was done with black ink on orange paper and coloured with coloured pencils. I've just consulted my archives and can tell you I was paid the princely sum of £220 pounds for it…"





"To better appeal to western tastes Technos restyled many of the graphics to give it a harder, sleazier edge"

# HOME SEQUELS

**The further adventures of Renegade, courtesy of Ocean Software**

### TARGET; RENEGADE

■ Technos had no direct involvement, and it was only released on home systems, but this follow-up is well regarded by fans. Adding a partner to fight alongside Renegade was an obvious move but it paid off brilliantly. Mike Lamb's versions for the Spectrum and CPC (pictured) are standout releases for their respective systems.

### RENEGADE III

■ You have to hand it to Ocean for trying something different with the third game, but adding a time-travel plot and platforming elements while taking away co-op and weapons (the things that made the second game so appealing) was a misjudged move. The Spectrum version (pictured) was the worst of a bad lot.





ultimate Guide

# CONVERSION CAPERS

Which of the home versions packed the biggest punch?



## COMMODORE 64 ▲

The C64 release looks great and features the smoothest scrolling of any of the home versions. The downside of this is that no more than three enemies are ever on screen at one time. The controls are also an issue, using three attack keys, which makes it fiddly to play using a joystick. It's worth persevering with, though.



## AMSTRAD CPC ▲

Similar to the C64 version, the game replicates the coin-op's fighting system with three attack keys. Get used to that and you have a very good version that plays as well as it looks. And if you've ever wondered why downed enemies spill blue blood, then see the Q&A with the game's artist, Mark K. Jones.



## APPLE II ◄

The coin-op and the Apple II both share a 6502 processor but this was still an overly ambitious conversion that ultimately failed. It's actually based on the NES version so there are some surprises in store for determined types. A version for the more capable Apple IIGS was advertised but never released.



## ATARI ST ►

This looks okay, featuring nicely miniaturised versions of the coin-op's sprites, but it plays like a dog. The biggest fight is against the game itself. The scrolling is choppy, the collision detection is iffy and the controls are barely implemented. Being thrown off that pier in stage two would be preferable to paying for this.



## ZX SPECTRUM ▲

It's easy to see why Spectrum fans hold this conversion in such high regard. The graphics are great (both the sprites and backdrops), the music is excellent (especially on the 128K version) and the controls work really well, with all of the moves mapped to a single file button so it can be played solely using a joystick.



## THOMSON ▲

The version for the Thomson MO/TO range of computers is a more-or-less a straight port of the classy Spectrum release, with all of the graphics carried over. This should be a good thing except that the code hasn't been well optimised so it runs really slowly. It's okay, but could have been much better with some additional work.



## PC-DOS ▲

Oh no! Based on the 16-bit versions, but it looks a lot worse (16 colour VGA mode is the best on offer) and it sounds terrible too. Gameplay is about the same, which is to say awful, and the whole sluggish mess should never have been released. It was ported by Banana Development, which evidently 'slipped up'.



## MASTER SYSTEM ▲

This didn't arrive until 1993 but it was definitely worth the wait. The stages are based on the NES version but the presentation is much improved throughout with better sound and graphics (including some amusing 'cutscenes'). If you're looking for a polished and fun to play home version of *Renegade* then give this a stab.



## AMIGA ▲

The only thing you can say about the Amiga version is that it's neither better nor worse than the ST game. It's essentially the same, so avoid it altogether. It's believed that this was never given a full price release, instead being pushed out on the Hit Squad label several years later. But even as a budget title you'd feel fleeced.



## NES ◄

Technos oversaw this version and succeeded in creating a game that was true to the coin-op while adding some neat twists to improve its longevity (although the maze of rooms at the end was a bit of a cheat). Best bit: the 'P' power-up that turns you into Super Renegade, where punches send enemies flying off the screen!







» [Arcade] Technos' arcade hit *Double Dragon II* reverted to the directional attack controls used in *Renegade*.

"There was very neany a fourth Renegade game for the Game Boy"

**When it comes to follow-ups there are actually three separate strands. There's the *Kunio-Kun* series, which straddles** various genres, although it does feature brawlers including Famicom favourite *Downtown Nekketsu Monogatari* (aka *River City Ransom* and *Street Gangs*). Then there's *Double Dragon* of course, which began life as a direct sequel to *Renegade* before evolving into its own long-running, genre-defining series. In Europe, Ocean lost out on the *Double Dragon* licence to Melbourne House and shrewdly responded by releasing its own *Renegade* sequels on the Imagine Software label.

The first sequel, *Target; Renegade*, was aimed exclusively at the 8-bit market and arrived on the Spectrum, CPC and C64 in 1988 and the NES in 1990. The game clearly riffed on *Double Dragon* by adding weapons and co-op play to the mix, and on home computers the game was far superior to the competing *Double Dragon* conversions. Ocean then took the shine off the series with a terrible third game that jettisoned everything that was good about the first two. *Renegade III* was a cartoony mess that's best forgotten.

There was nearly a fourth *Renegade* game for the Game Boy. In 1991, Technos took its handheld *Nekketsu Kouha Kunio-kun* spin-off, which was subtitled *Bangai Rantou Hen* (*The Further Brawls*), and 'westernised' it to become *The Renegades*. The game was advertised but eventually surfaced as the Game Boy version of *Double Dragon II*. The more marketable series won through in the end.

*Renegade* doesn't deserve to be forgotten, and indeed it hasn't been on PlayStation 4 where it was recently added to the growing *Arcade Archives* collection. You can download the coin-op versions of *Renegade* along with the first two *Double Dragon* games – and even *Karate Champ*, Technos' one-on-one fighter from 1984. They're perfect for refreshing your fighting game history while you're waiting in a *Street Fighter V* lobby. ★



» [Amstrad CPC] The two-player follow-up proved to be another smash hit for Ocean.

# DEVELOPER Q&A

## Ocean artist Mark K. Jones explains how he pixelated Renegade for the Amstrad CPC

**How did you get the *Renegade* job at Ocean?**
After working on the C64 version of *Arkanoid* John Brandwood requested that I work with him on the Amstrad CPC, which was my favourite machine and the one I had the most experience with.

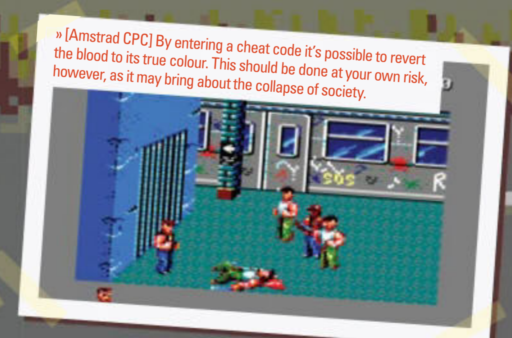
**Did you have access to the *Renegade* coin-op during development?**
The *Renegade* machine was just behind me in Ocean's 'Arcade Alley'. It was open to be played at any time but mostly I used the video we made of it. I liked the game, but *having* to play it kind of takes away some of the fun.

**From a graphics point of view what was the biggest challenge you faced?**
The resolution of the coin-op was obviously higher than the Amstrad. The challenge was in creating an art style that worked well on the Amstrad but also echoed the arcade machine's 'look'.

**Did the violence in the game cause any issues?**
Some. Originally we had red blood oozing from the heads of defeated opponents and in the final release we changed the blood to blue. There was always some debate with violence in games. It's rather tame to what we have now of course, but the demographic of game players has shifted to more adult players. The blood caused the biggest issue, though. Personally I've always thought it best to show the result of violence.

**Were you aware of the cheat code that can be entered to turn the blood back to red?**
I did know there was a cheat code, but I wasn't sure if the bosses knew it. I wouldn't be too surprised if Gary Bracey had not suggested it though!

**Do you think the CPC was a good platform for graphics, and did you enjoy working on it?**
John and I loved the Amstrad. It was a very capable machine in the right hands. I felt the graphics were the best of the trinity of Speccy, C64 and CPC. It didn't have the hardware oomph of the Commodore, but just on pure 'looks' I thought that the Amstrad was the best. I learned my skills on the Amstrad and I loved mine.


» [Amstrad CPC] By entering a cheat code it's possible to revert the blood to its true colour. This should be done at your own risk, however, as it may bring about the collapse of society.

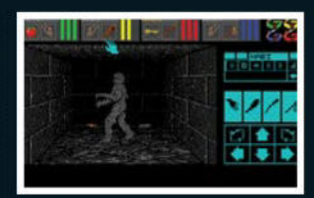
# Atari 1040ST

» **MANUFACTURER:** Atari Corporation » **YEAR:** 1986
» **COST:** $999 (LAUNCH), £30+ (TODAY)

While Atari had already launched the 16-bit 520ST in 1985, the company's introduction of the 1040ST in early 1986 was a watershed moment for the home computer market – for the first time, a complete computer with one megabyte of RAM was available for less than $1,000. However, for gamers the most attractive inclusion was the built-in floppy disk drive, which carried over to the new Atari 520STF, and then the later inclusion of an RF modulator for TV output in the STFM models.

Thanks to its affordability, always a key part of the business model that Atari owner Jack Tramiel employed, the Atari ST line was particularly popular in the home computer market of the late Eighties – and this was especially true in European countries. While the Amiga's audiovisual hardware made it preferable for some players, high value software bundles such as the Power Pack and Mega Pack positioned Atari's machine strongly with gamers. However, the rise of the PC market and Atari's decision to focus solely on the Jaguar saw development of the ST line discontinued in 1993. Despite this, the machine remains popular with hobbyists, particularly amongst musicians due to its utility in the production of MIDI music.

## ESSENTIAL GAME



### Dungeon Master

If you're going to play a role-playing game on the Atari ST, the best selling one of them all is probably a good shout – and *Dungeon Master* is that game. All the traditional fantasy elements were in place, but the game broke with the tradition of the genre by making your actions much less abstract. Instead of taking part in turn-based action, players could explore and fight in real time, meaning that if a monster was approaching it was doing so *right then*. Likewise, skills were developed simply by actually using them, rather than building experience points.




## Atari ST fact

■ The digital hardcore group Atari Teenage Riot took its name from the Atari ST it used to make music – and still uses it to compose and perform to this day.

**RAM:** 1MB

**PROCESSOR:** MOTOROLA 68000 (8MHZ)

**AUDIO:** YAMAHA YM-2149 SOUND CHIP (3 CHANNEL SQUARE WAVE, 1 CHANNEL WHITE NOISE)

**OPERATING SYSTEM:** 192KB TOS ROM

**MEDIA:** BUILT-IN DOUBLE-SIDED FLOPPY DISK DRIVE (720KB CAPACITY)

# 3D STARSTRIKE & STARSTRIKE II

Having completed the excellent Battlezone clone, 3D Tank Duel, while at their final year of university, trio Graeme Baird, Andrew Onions and Ian Oliver turned their attention to outer space. Graeme Mason chats to the latter about Realtime's defining series

LASER
FUEL
FIELD

It is a well-documented phenomenon that the early Eighties home computer videogame scene was dominated by arcade clones, rather than the officially licensed titles that reigned over the latter part of the decade. Every classic coin-op had several examples, especially on the UK's popular Sinclair ZX Spectrum, and publishers would often push their luck even further by cheekily naming their games to mimic the original, making it entirely clear what they were ripping off. Early examples included Bug-Byte's *Spectral Invaders*, Ocean's *Kong* and the one-hit wonder from Megadodo, *Pheenix*, and there are absolutely no prizes for guessing the inspiration behind these games. Meanwhile, released in 1983, Atari's *Star Wars* swiftly became one of those revered coin-ops, loved by virtually everyone who experienced it. Eventually the game would receive an official conversion by publisher Domark and developer Vektor Grafix. But until that game's release in 1987, fans had an excellent homage to play instead: *3D Starstrike* from Realtime Games, based in Leeds, Yorkshire.

Having met at the city's university (most probably in the student union bar rather than a lecture hall, **Retro Gamer** speculates), Graeme Baird, Andrew Onions and Ian Oliver quickly



[Amstrad] *3D Starstrike* was essentially *Star Wars* but without the licence.

3D graphics. "It was pretty basic – but it gave us a start on the key techniques involved," notes Ian.

One of the group's (and Ian's in particular) favourite games was the famed twin-stick vector graphic coin-op *Battlezone*. "We mainly played arcade games," admits Ian, "as they were streets ahead of what the home computers could manage at the time. There was a *Battlezone* machine at the Leeds University student bar and I could play for hours on one coin." While in their final year,

> "There was a Battlezone at the Leeds University student bar and I could play for hours on one coin"
> Ian Oliver

became firm friends. "We were all doing degrees in computer science," says Ian, "and all of us had computers at home for many years. My first was an Ohio Scientific Superboard II in the late Seventies, when I was around 16 years old. We'd also all been involved in a fair amount of programming – mainly in assembler, for speed. At university we mostly wrote in Pascal, on glacially slow mainframes – so we all preferred microcomputers." As part of their university course, the three students studied a module on

the three worked on *3D Tank Duel*, a convincing attempt at emulating the arcade classic. Also known as *Battle-Tank Simulator*, *3D Tank Duel*, together with Crystal Computing's *Rommel's Revenge*, would prove to be the pinnacle of *Battlezone* clones on the ZX Spectrum in particular. "We self-published [*3D Tank Duel*] because we figured that's what you did," laughs Ian. "The multiple middlemen of the industry were a closed book to us. We understood programmers and gamers, and everyone else seemed less

## IN THE KNOW

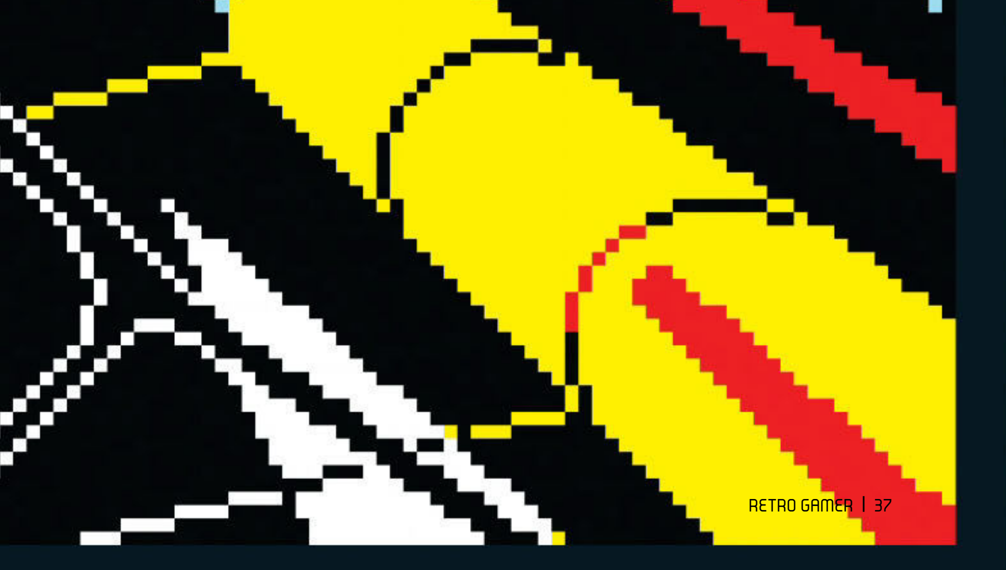
» **PUBLISHER:** REALTIME GAMES
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1984 & 1986
» **PLATFORM:** Various
» **GENRE:** Shoot-'em-up




## STARSTRIKE 101

■ Clearly inspired by Atari's *Star Wars*, *3D Starstrike* was an impressive Spectrum shooter that boasted magnificent 3D graphics that immediately set it apart from many similar games. Its sequel, *Starstrike II*, was an even more impressive beast, featuring enhanced aesthetics, along with plenty of hectic blasting.






relevant." It didn't matter; released in the summer of 1984, *3D Tank Duel* was well-received, notching a credible score of 83% in issue seven of *Crash* magazine. Having ventured successfully into vector graphics, the Atari interpretation of a certain 1977 movie was an obvious next move for the boys at Realtime Games.

But, of course, the argument that, 'Everyone else is creating unofficial arcade clones, so why can't we?' was not one that was likely to win over the arcade giant, or Lucasfilm. "The copyright issue worried us a lot," remembers Ian. "Wisely we changed the name of everything because it's actually easier to claim copyright over characters than concepts. But we were still very concerned that someone might object." However, in terms of actual gameplay, *3D Starstrike* followed much of the pattern of the *Star Wars* coin-op, with a few noticeable differences. The enemy is not the Sith-infested Empire, but the Outsiders: massive fleets of aliens intent on the decimation of Earth and the Federation. In desperation, it is decided to strike back directly at the Outsiders' power base: a series of hollowed out moons from which their attacks are launched. Each moon requires a direct hit on the base's reactor chamber which is accessed via two cooling ports laying at the end of a hazardous duct. The game begins with a dogfight in outer space against suspiciously TIE fighter-esque enemies. The second phase takes the player to the surface of the moon and an assault against numerous fireball-spitting towers, before finally moving to the trench (sorry, *duct*), culminating in a shot at the cooling ports. Stop us if any of this sounds familiar.

As befitted such a small outfit, the roles within Realtime were flexible, with each of the three having their specialities, but pitching in as required. Ian explains: "There was a lot of overlap. Andy and myself worked on a lot of the graphics primitives – line drawing, text sprites – and also did the maths routines. Remember, there were no accelerators for anything back then! In the meantime, Graeme worked on the 3D shapes and the higher-level 3D routines. I tended to work on most of the game play, collision detection and so on." The main driving force of *3D Starstrike* was speed; Realtime realised the game needed to be fast, or as fast as possible, for it to work and appeal to gamers. Technical workarounds were needed at each step. "Every trick in the book, and then ten more that we invented ourselves," grins Ian. "We knew every Z80 instruction – including the illegal ones – and how long they took to execute, so much so I could lie in the bath and rewrite the inner loop of a line drawer, or polygon filler, in my head using different register allocations to see what worked best. We did the same for all of the maths routines, collision detection, everything." Although, presumably, Ian and his colleagues did a bit of work outside of the bathroom, too.

By the standards of 1984, the biggest achievement of *3D Starstrike* was its speed and elegant graphics, accomplished by Realtime's supreme technical skills. The team was given a confidence boost by the enthusiastic response to an early version at various trade shows, and the reviews of the final game were also enviable. "Although the game *Star Wars* has been attempted to be copied many times in recent months," gushed one slightly-confused *Crash* magazine reviewer, "none have really gone for the feeling and graphic representation and [the graphics] are very detailed and well within

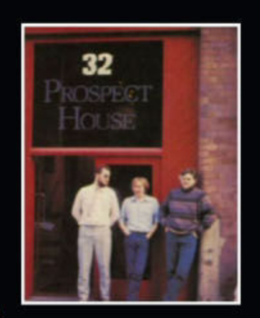


## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**STARGLIDER** (PICTURED)
**SYSTEM:** Various
**YEAR:** 1986

**STARFOX**
**SYSTEM:** Various
**YEAR:** 1987

**CARRIER COMMAND**
**SYSTEM:** Various
**YEAR:** 1989




A promotional pic from the Eighties, showing the Realtime staff taking a quick break from coding.



playable speed." While *Starstrike* perhaps lacked speed in comparison to, say, *Dark Star* (Design Design), it still moved along at a mightily rapid rate, even on image intensive segments such as the trench run (sorry *duct*). "We applied a technique where we only rotated a cube using multiplies," explains Ian, "and then the other points for our 3D shapes were created in this cube using interpolations between existing points. This interpolator was driven by an interpreted language and it really did give [the game] a speed boost." There was, however, a downside to this rigorous method: writing the language took time and skill, meaning the team had to do everything themselves rather than rely on an artist for the graphics. This included the game's impressive explosions, which remained a constant project throughout development. "We were improving all the time," notes Ian. "By the time we were writing *Battle Command*, various spheres could be ejected along with the more blocky shapes, and fireballs could grow and shrink."

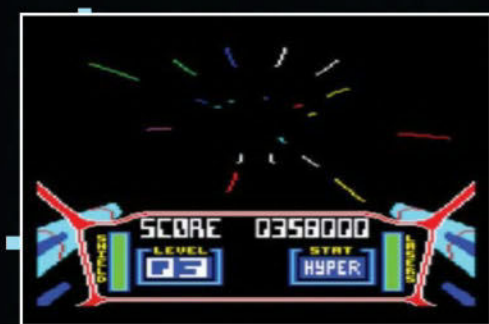
*3D Starstrike* launched just eight months after *3D Tank Duel*. "That was pretty fast given all the issues we had," says Ian, the memory of late nights and fiendish bug testing still raw. "The main problem was that we were working using just Spectrums and typing Z80 assembler into REM statements. We didn't use a linker, so just kept notes on paper of the addresses of key routines and structures. Actually, given the way we were working, even finishing what we did was a major effort. By the time we did the sequel we had refined things a little, so the gameplay was a little more complex." Additional problems, such as the unreliability of Sinclair's microdrives as a storage unit, also added stress and delay. And although well-received, *3D Starstrike* had the bad luck to be released around the same time as Design Design's aforementioned *Dark Star*, as Ian recalls. "We knew the Design Design guys pretty well, and it was an interesting game. As I always told them, however, it wasn't really 3D!"

The final piece of *Starstrike* was its exciting cover, drawn by the talented Newsfield artist Oli Frey. "As it happens, the Newsfield [team] was based in Ludlow, which was Andy Onions' home town," says Ian. "And they even rented some property from Andy's father. So we got on well with them and there were mutual favours – although they always insisted that they'd tell it how it was in their reviews." The relationship with the publisher drew parallels with Design Design, and both Design Design and Realtime were the subject of a feature in *Crash*. "I seem to remember the *Crash* reporter came across as quite interested in what we were doing," recalls Ian, "and also found us unlike other developers in many ways." The visit of journalist Hannah Smith coincided with the release of *Starstrike II*, the third Spectrum game to be released by Realtime in two years. "Eight months after *Tank Duel*," she wrote in the subsequent article, "Realtime's *Starstrike* heralded a new generation of wire-frame 3D games for the Spectrum. With its fast-moving action and colourful graphics, the game was state of the art and, predictably, a success."

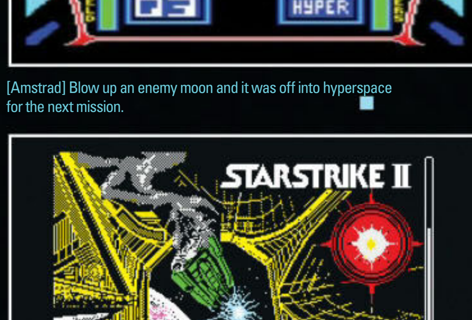
> **"We knew every Z80 instruction – including the illegal ones!"**
> Ian Oliver




[ZX Spectrum] At the beginning of each stage the player was given a short brief.




[Amstrad] Blow up an enemy moon and it was off into hyperspace for the next mission.






## THE GAMES OF REALTIME GAMES




### 3D TANK DUEL

■ 'Inspired' by the Atari coin-op *Battlezone*, *3D Tank Duel* was one of many clones of the popular arcade machine, and one of the finest. Developed while the team was still studying at university, Realtime cut its teeth here, and while the graphics can sometimes become a little cluttered and indistinct, the game moves at a fair pace.



### STARGLIDER

■ While it was designing the follow-up to *3D Starstrike*, Realtime was hired by Rainbird to create the ZX Spectrum and Amstrad versions of this popular 16-bit shoot-'em-up. By now the team was extremely skilled at creating the necessary routines and both versions are excellent, if a little in the shadow of the technically superior 16-bit versions.



### STARFOX

■ No doubt impressed by *Starstrike II*'s graphics, Ariolasoft employed Realtime to code another space shooter. While not as instantly enjoyable as the original *3D Starstrike*, *Starfox* is a neat and playable shoot-'em-up with some pretensions of complexity thanks to its navigational 3D holocube and weapon escalation concept.



### CARRIER COMMAND

■ Continuing its relationship with Rainbird, Realtime branched out into 16-bit territory for this naval simulation. The game was conceived by Rainbird's Clare Edgeley and made a reality by Realtime. While the 16-bit versions are the best, squeezing the graphics and gameplay into the 128k ZX Spectrum was a fantastic achievement.



### BATTLE COMMAND

■ Loosely based upon *Carrier Command*, *Battle Command* was a logical step forward with the player now in charge of an assault tank known as the Mauler. This time published by Ocean, once more Realtime used a blend of simulation and arcade action as the vehicle was dropped into a variety of different battlefields.

Indeed, *3D Starstrike* was a smash with consumers too, selling 60,000 copies between the Spectrum and Amstrad versions, despite Realtime's ignorance of the software market. "We were just a bunch of 21-year-olds with no clue about sales channels, so that was probably quite modest for the time – but we were getting the lion's share of the retail price. And we were working from a back-to-back terrace house that we also lived in, so we suddenly found ourselves to be rather rich. Fortunately, we did the honourable thing and blew it all on ephemera, rather than investing it, which was why we had to do the sequel," Ian remembers.

By the end of 1985, after a busy period 'drinking the *Starstrike* royalties', Realtime began developing a follow-up to its most famous hit. "We actually wanted to do something original for once," notes Ian. "However, we found out that this is in reality quite difficult and you end up going down a lot of blind alleys. I'm not sure exactly when we started planning [*Starstrike II*], but it took much longer to develop." The idea for the sequel was that pure wireframe graphics were no longer enough – to impress gamers in the harsh glare of 1986, solid, and fast, graphics were required. "We had continued to improve and accelerate every other part of the 3D system as we went along," explains Ian. "And we were never really happy with the wireframe. So we started to play around with polygon fillers." To achieve the desired results, and keep everything moving at a fair lick, Ian and his colleagues had to be at the top of their game. Those of a non-technical disposition may want to look away now. "We used an in-order off-screen buffer for all drawing and then moved this to the Spectrum's zany screen layout via 'beam chasing' to avoid tearing," grins Ian, still relishing this topic of conversation. "Because this buffer was in order, you needed to add 32 to go down a line. The Z80 processor has a single 16-bit maths operation which is designed to stack frames. So, during the polygon filler, you switch to a stack that's 32 bytes from the top of the memory, put negative 32 in the maths operation and, voila, a nice fast way to go down one line that doesn't need any other registers." Sounds simple, we note in a bemused fashion. "Ha. That gives you a glimpse into how our minds worked, and what was necessary to get the speed we achieved."

It seems apt that the majority of our conversation with Ian on *Starstrike II* is technical, given the game was a veritable marvel, especially squeezed into the 48k Spectrum. "Not only did it fit," says the coder, "but the assembler we used is still there in the binary! This is because we'd load the binary to date, load the routine we were working on, edit, assemble in as a patch and then test." The result was simply astounding, in an era where 3D shooters were rare, and generally relied heavily upon wireframe graphics. *Starstrike II* was predictably much more labour-intensive than the original. "Taking control of the Spectrum's interrupts was a pain and usually required a table of 257 bytes, all with the same value," winces Ian. "We used blank areas of the ROM and put a relative jump in the last byte of memory that took us back in a bit in this last page. Fortunately this didn't clash with the polygon filler stack." As with *3D Starstrike*, Realtime converted *Starstrike II* to the Amstrad CPC. A Spectrum 128k version was also considered. "But [the computer] came out very late in the development of the game," explains Ian, "and it was only around in small

> **"We all knew 6502, but were of the view the games would be too slow on the C64"**
> Ian Oliver



[Amstrad] This section in *Starstrike II* is quite tricky and needs some good piloting to negotiate.



[ZX Spectrum] Attacking the planet's surface in Realtime's impressive *Starstrike II*.



[ZX Spectrum] Euphemism of the day, neutralised.

## A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP




Realtime was the subject of individual profile-style features in *Crash* magazine. "Back in the earliest *Crash* days, Andy Onions visited us to show off development on the wireframe game *3D Tank Duel*," remembers Roger Kean, editor of the magazine at the time. "The connection we had with them was simple: his parents owned the Old Firestation shop about five doors up from where we were still putting *Crash* together." Newsfield soon began renting out the upper floors of the Firestation for staff who had moved to Ludlow. *3D Tank Duel* itself got a preview in issue six of *Crash* and a subsequent 83% review, together with a full page ad drawn by Oli Frey. When it came to reviews, it helped that Realtime's games were excellent. "By the time we interviewed them for *Crash*, it was under Graeme Kidd's control," explains Roger, "but there wouldn't have been much choice as far as the early reviews went – back then Ludlow school 'rooled' and there are few more obdurate reviewers than 13 and 14-year-olds!"

numbers." Realtime would soon be working on the expanded Spectrum with its adaptation of *Starglider* for Rainbird.

Released towards the end of 1986, *Starstrike II* received glowing reviews across the two formats coded by Realtime. A Commodore 64 version was not considered by the team to be viable. "We all knew 6502," says Ian, "but we were of the view the games would be too slow on the C64. As it happens, we found out how wrong we were during the development of *Battle Command* (Rainbird). A guy called Steve Caslin was a wizard with 6502 and he did some great graphics for the C64." Sales of *Starstrike II* were steady, rather than spectacular. "I thought the gameplay was a bit slow in some sections," laments Ian, "and it definitely didn't sell as well as the first game." The mediocre sales, combined with Realtime's successful association with Rainbird, meant there was to be no *Starstrike III*.

Despite its success with the *Starstrike* series and developer-only games such as *Starglider* and *Carrier Command*, Ian, Graeme and Andy were pragmatic enough to realise their small outfit was not likely to succeed long term. "Games were becoming massive team efforts, which wasn't really us; we really just wanted to do geeky coding," Ian notes.

Graeme Baird remains in the industry, having recently been involved in one such team working on *LittleBigPlanet 3*. "Andy [Onions] stayed in gaming for a while, but I've lost touch with him," says Ian. "I drifted away from gaming to concentrate on creating development tools, and I still do this today." Nevertheless, he looks back nostalgically at his time running Realtime and creating games such as *Starstrike*. "I regard that time fondly, but I can also see the huge number of things we got wrong. We could have been massively successful if we'd just been a little more business savvy." The coder pauses, considers his memories of the time before signing off. "Still, I guess that's what being young is all about…"

**Our thanks to Ian Oliver for his time.**

# BECOME A STARSTRIKE GOD



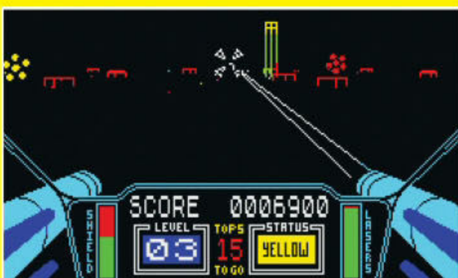

### FIGHT FIRE WITH FIRE

■ In the first wave it is not essential to shoot down the enemy fighters, unless you are going for a high score. The fireballs appear very quickly, so concentrate on them and take out the odd fighter that wanders into your sights. ▼



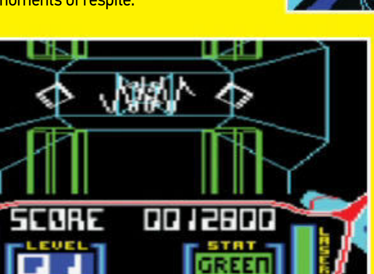

### UP ON THE CATWALKS ▲

■ *Starstrike*'s trench section is much denser than perhaps you'd expect, especially on the harder difficulty levels. Focus on avoiding the many catwalks as multiple collisions will soon see your Starstrike-class fighter downed.




### TOP OF THE TOWER

■ As with the classic *Star Wars* arcade game, shooting the summit of the towers in section two nets a score bonus. Considering it's a massive 50,000 points, it's well worth risking a few shields in the process. ▼




### DON'T LEAN ON THE FIRE BUTTON ▲

■ Your Starstrike-class space fighter is armed with lasers – but they tend to overheat. Keep a close eye on the meter in the bottom right hand corner and don't forget to let them recharge in those rare moments of respite.

### AVOIDING SURFACE TENSION

■ *Starstrike*'s second stage sees your fighter skimming the surface while towers and bunkers spit those ubiquitous – and dangerous – fireballs. Make sure to alternate moving your craft up and down to avoid the enemy weaponry, adjusting as the heat gets too much at a particular height. ▼




### FINAL ASSAULT ▲

■ The ultimate section of *Starstrike* is actually quite simple – a handful of shots on the cooling ports and the zigzagging force field is gone; cue the climatic and explosive denouement and scratch one enemy base.




### MEDIUM DIFFICULTY? PAH!

■ By all means warm up with the Easy and Medium skill levels, but the real challenge is with the Hard and Very Hard difficulties. Here the fireballs are faster and more frequent, and even the most skilled pilot has to be at the top of their game to survive.

COMPUTER COMBAT




# 4MB Extended RAM Cartridge

» **PLATFORM:** SEGA SATURN » **RELEASED:** 1997 » **COST:** £15 (WITHOUT GAME)

While the Saturn was a sprite-shifting powerhouse that never struggled with 2D games, it did have one key deficiency that could prevent perfect arcade ports – the limited amount of RAM on the standard model. Sega's solution was to release the Extended RAM Cartridge in 1996, which added one megabyte of extra memory, but developers found that even this wasn't enough and the add-on was followed up a year later with a four megabyte model.

The main use of the RAM expansion was to store extra sprite data for 2D arcade conversions, and it allowed the machine to shine. Where competing consoles struggled to reproduce these games well, often featuring heavy cuts to animation and even occasionally dropped features, the expanded Saturn fared much better with the latest fighting games from Capcom and SNK.

Unfortunately, neither of the RAM expansions ever made it out of Japan – though there were talks between to bring the 4MB cartridge to the UK alongside *X-Men Vs. Street Fighter*, these went nowhere after Sega, Virgin Interactive and Capcom reportedly failed to reach an agreement on retail pricing. Still, the import market is so essential to Saturn owners that the RAM expansion is still well worth owning. *

## ESSENTIAL GAME
### X-Men Vs. Street Fighter

It's a shame that UK gamers never got the Saturn version of Capcom's first crossover brawler, because it's not only an excellent conversion but a great game. The likes of Wolverine, Magneto and Rogue clash with Ryu, M. Bison and Chun-Li – but the *Street Fighter* cast has gained new powers to match Marvel's mutants, like fighter-sized fireballs and the ability to jump much higher. The RAM Cartridge enabled the Saturn version to include the tag-team fights of the arcade version, which unfortunately had to be cut from the later PlayStation conversion.






## 4MB Extended RAM Cartridge fact

■ Most games requiring the Extended RAM Cartridge will work with the 4MB model, but *The King Of Fighters '96*, *Real Bout Fatal Fury* and *Samurai Shodown IV* suffer glitches.

# LICENCE TO THRILL

## NOW SHOWING







### FILM

» **YEAR:** 1986
» **STUDIO:** Warner Brothers
» **DIRECTOR:** George P. Cosmatos
» **STARRING:** Sylvester Stallone, Brigitte Nielsen, Reni Santoni, Andrew Robinson, Brian Thompson
» **BUDGET:** $25,000,000
» **BOX OFFICE:** $49,000,000 (US) $160,000,000 (ROW)

### GAME

» **YEAR:** 1987, 1988
» **PUBLISHER:** Ocean
» **DEVELOPER:** Jonathan Smith (Spectrum), Zach Townsend (C64), John Gibson (Amstrad)

**"Crime is a disease. He's the cure." So went the tagline to the 1986 action movie Cobra. Graeme Mason revisits movie and game to find out how the last 30 years has treated them…**

In 1985, Sylvester Stallone had the world at his feet. The *Rocky* franchise had yet to hit the nadir of its fifth outing; *Rambo: First Blood Part 2*, despite having dispensed with most of the psychological intricacies of the first movie, was a massive hit. Studios were desperate for fresh potential money-spinning vehicles for the muscled star, and a police detective role was an understandable next step. Coincidentally, Paramount Pictures appeared to have the perfect part as wise-cracking Detroit cop Axel Foley in its fish-out-of-water flick, *Beverly Hills Cop*. Contrary to the popular myth, *Beverly Hills Cop* was not written with Stallone in mind, having been originally devised by producers Don Simpson and Jerry Bruckheimer back in the Seventies, before Stallone's major player status had materialised. After offering the role of Foley to Mickey Rourke, the producers approached the *Rambo* and *Rocky* star who began to dramatically alter its script. With the film now resembling a straight cop-action-thriller, Stallone bailed shortly before production was due to commence, for reasons unconfirmed, but often attributed to the prospective spiralling cost of the screenplay. Comedian Eddie Murphy signed on to replace him, and *Beverly Hills Cop* became the comedy thriller we know and love today.

Meanwhile, Cannon Group, a production company best known for its low-budget, yet successful, action movies, had acquired the rights to the debut novel of Paula Gosling. The book was known by two titles: *Fair Game* (US) and *A Running Duck* (UK), and was published in 1978, winning its author the John Creasey Memorial Award for best first novel that year. *A Running Duck* focuses on Clare Randell, unfortunate witness to a hitman on his way to work, and ex-army assassin-turned-cop Lieutenant




» [ZX Spectrum] Cobra hooks up with Ingrid in the factory.




» [ZX Spectrum] Strolling around the factory searching for the Night Slasher.

Mike Malchek, assigned to protect her. Through a series of twists and escapades, the pair seek to not just evade, but capture and eliminate the villainous Edison who is attempting to dispose of the only person who can identify him. Having retained the ideas for his revision of *Beverly Hills Cop*, Stallone and Cannon Films reached a deal and the actor set to work creating the script for *Cobra*, the anguine sobriquet for the title character Marion Cobretti. Other than its central premise, most of the novel was jettisoned as Stallone brought in his current squeeze, Brigitte Nielsen, to play the female lead – now renamed Ingrid Knutsen, and a model rather than an advertising executive – and created a gang of thugs, led by a man known as the Night Slasher, whose aim is to eliminate

**“I don’t deal with psychos. I put them away”** Marion ‘Cobra’ Cobretti

the weak, leaving the strong to rule the world. Stallone also drastically rewrote the Malchek character, assigning him to an elite team known as the Zombie Squad and including other elements designed to essentially make himself look as cool as possible. It worked; the actor looked the epitome of a nonchalant hero with aviator sunglasses and a constant matchstick between his teeth and Cobra became a right-wing vigilante’s wet dream as the rogue cop strutted around, violently disposing of anyone he took a disliking to, with barely a thought to due process. None of this deterred the film critics from savaging *Cobra*, and the movie still has a poor reputation today, despite a cult following. But – and it’s a big box office but – the movie did make ▶

» [ZX Spectrum] As in the movie, Cobra proves to be pretty nifty with a blade.




» [Amstrad] The in-game film poster is a nice touch.

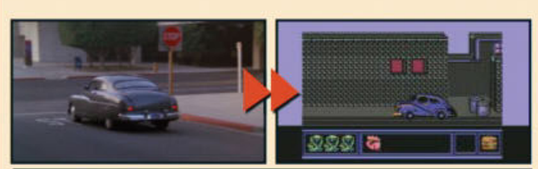



» [C64] The enemies on motorcycles were a highlight.



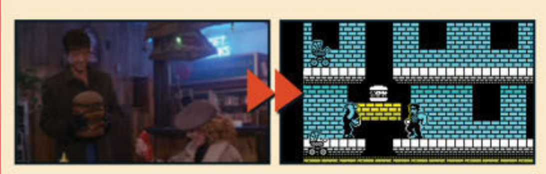

## MOVIE TO GAME COMPARISON

How scenes from the silver screen shaped up next to the various home console versions



### ONE (UN)CAREFUL OWNER

Cobra’s car is actually a custom-made 1950 Mercury owned by Stallone himself, although ‘stunt double’ versions are used for most of the movie’s action scenes. It appears briefly at the beginning of the Commodore 64 game, looking more Volkswagen Beetle than classic Mercury.



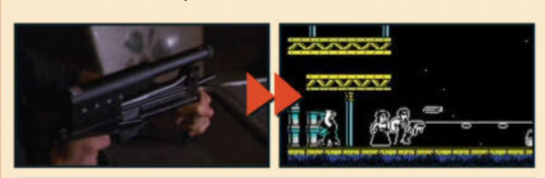
### BURGER ME

Jonathan Smith took this small, quirky scene in the movie – a painful segment where Stallone jokes around with a giant plastic burger – and cannily used the fast food to hide the game’s power-ups: a pistol, knife, invincibility and a machine gun.



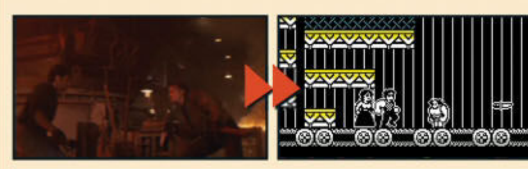
### GET AWAY

Hounded by the evil New World Order gang, Cobra and Ingrid head off to the countryside, because, you know, it’s a lot safer in the rolling hills than in the city. Level two of the Spectrum version shows how just dangerous rural California can really be.



### NOW I HAVE A MACHINE GUN

Cobra’s weapon of choice for the showdown with the New World Order is a variant of a rare submachine gun called the Jatimatic. Never officially used in any country, the addition of a laser sight made the gun memorable in both film and game.



### I’M THE CURE

It’s inevitable that Cobra should come face-to-face with the leader of the New World Order gang, the Night Slasher. The Spectrum and Amstrad versions reveal the head bad guy, and in the former he’s portrayed as a dwarf, and takes one carefully-timed head-butt to dispose of.









» [C64] Trawling the streets in an early part of the game on the C64.

» [ZX Spectrum] Joffa Smith's humour was present from the start.



money, and a fair amount, and its violent nature made it a natural candidate for a home videogame.

*Cobra* was one of the first of a wave of licensed movie games from Manchester software house Ocean. Three versions were planned for the most popular platforms in the UK at the time, ZX Spectrum, Commodore 64 and Amstrad, and all were handled in-house, with principal design falling to the late Jonathan Smith. For his Spectrum version, Jonathan would oversee both graphics and code, with Martin Galway providing the game's music. Writing on his website years ago, Jonathan explained, "Myself and Martin Galway were treated to a private showing of the movie, months before it was released. I wasn't particularly impressed with *Cobra*, so I decided to make [the game] more comical in nature."

**The resulting ZX Spectrum adaptation of *Cobra* was a game that likely delighted and bemused in equal measure** those who had actually seen the Stallone movie. A sideways scrolling arcade game was a logical choice – the technical and gameplay elements Jonathan melded into *Cobra* and made it an idiosyncratic wonder. Foremost was the game's beautifully smooth scrolling. "At the time, the game featured a unique screen display mechanism," Jonathan recalled on his website. "This meant pregenerating the code to draw and scroll the background images, and involved pointing the Z80's processor stack at the screen RAM and pushing predefined 16-bit registers onto it. It was restricting – but extremely fast." Having been disappointed by the movie, Jonathan incorporated a number of seemingly irrelevant elements into the game. First, came the define keys page; 'Push Me' it demanded, and the coder, no doubt influenced by *Cobra*'s imaginative approach to law enforcement, replaced the fire key with 'murder'. In the game itself, each weapon Cobra picks up is concealed within a burger, drawn from a minor comic scene in the film where Stallone jokes with Nielsen in a restaurant. Every weapon has a short life span represented by a slowly-dissolving duck, which we guess was influenced by the UK book title upon which the movie is based.

Over the three levels of the Spectrum version, Cobra must rid each stage of its assorted bad guys using the weapons provided or his powerful head-butt. When Ingrid appears, she joins up with Cobra, giving the hero the ability to withstand one hit, although the poor

# NOTABLE VERSIONS OF COBRA



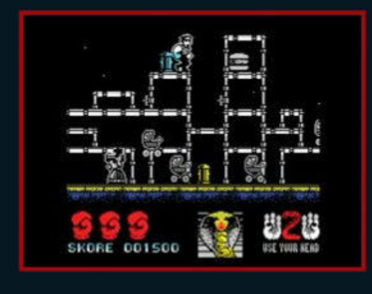

## AMSTRAD

■ There's some doubt over who was responsible for the Amstrad version. The cassette inlay credits John Gibson, but the ex-Imagine coder could not recall anything about it when we quizzed him. While similar in some respects to the Spectrum version it appears unlikely this was a straight port, and the game suffers greatly in comparison. Stodgy controls and its dull and repetitive gameplay don't help, although should Cobra manage to slog his way through the many identical levels, he at least gets a kiss from the lovely Ingrid at the game's conclusion.




## COMMODORE 64

■ Coder Zach Townsend was handed the Cobra C64 licence as his first gig at Ocean, so perhaps we should cut the game some slack. Despite being 'inspired' by the Spectrum version, it's a shadow of Jonathan Smith's game. The game is relentlessly tough, with gun-toting maniacs and axe-wielding thugs attacking Cobra constantly. Instead of a head-butt, Cobra punches, although, perhaps appropriately considering the way he tiptoes through each level, it resembles a gentle slap to the face. About the only saving grace is an excellent tune by Ben Daglish.




## ZX SPECTRUM

■ Renowned as not only one of Ocean's better games, but also one of the best on the Speccy, many consider *Cobra* to also be Jonathan Smith's finest hour – high praise considering the coder's output on the system. Its accessible gameplay is complemented by a rebellious sense of humour. Even Jonathan himself was pleased with the result, although a game-breaking bug in the final level frustrated him and gamers alike. If Cobra uses his invincibility to kill the Night Slasher, the game fails to register the hit, condemning our hero to wander the factory forever.






## ARTISTIC LICENCE

These weren't in the film…

### PARROT POWER

■ If you played the Amstrad version of *Cobra*, you'd have noticed the occasional parrot. Wander underneath it and the avian does its business on our hero. The nearest to this in the movie is a few seagulls circling in the open scene.



### BABIES R US

■ While the film's evil gang undoubtedly features one or two female members, it's never clear if any of them are handy with a rocket launcher. As to the prams, if there are any in the movie, we missed them, and certainly never does one launch itself at our hero, forcing him to convulse uncontrollably for a few seconds.



### FEELING THIRSTY?

■ While its name may fit nicely into the theme of the main character, this far-from-fancy-looking bar never appears in the movie – the closest we get is a motel restaurant. We can only presume that is Cobra's partner, Gonzales, loitering outside.





» [Amstrad] Poor Cobra gets attacked by a dangerous thug outside the Snake Pit.




» [Amstrad] The villain's van, used to deadly effect in the film's early stages.

distraught lady will subsequently disappear. After an urban scene, it's off to the countryside, before the final confrontation with a strangely diminutive Night Slasher in the factory level. Cobra has three lives and these are shown as boxing gloves, one of the game's many references to Sylvester Stallone's most famous franchise, *Rocky*. The game reviewed fantastically well at the time with *Crash* awarding it 93% and *Your Sinclair* giving 8 out of 10. Sadly, things were a little different on the other formats.

**Jonathan Smith is credited with design (or inspiration) for the Commodore 64 version of *Cobra*, yet it's difficult to see** what influence he had on coder Zach Townsend's freshman effort. Unlike the Spectrum game, the map does not wrap around, and the big man himself looks akin to a tip-toeing ballet dancer. Generally, the sprites and graphics are average, although the game features a nifty tune from Ben Daglish. But it lacks playability, and was savaged (somewhat unfairly) by *Zzap64!* in particular, with a pitiful score of 13%. Perhaps knowing this, the Night Slasher himself is nowhere to be seen, although Cobra's Fifties car makes an early appearance. Amstrad owners got another curiously different interpretation of the movie. With the game's protagonist looking a fraction cooler than in the Commodore 64 version, the game scrolls to the left and right, but once more suffers from jerky movement and poor key

> **"This is where the law stops and I start – sucker!"**
> Marion 'Cobra' Cobretti




» [ZX Spectrum] Oddly, Cobra explodes upon dying.




» [Amstrad] Enemies come thick and fast. Be prepared.

responses. The map also continues monotonously throughout the game with only the appearance of Ingrid livening up a tirade of constant enemies. Even more bizarre is the conclusion: Cobra cosies up to Ingrid (who at least has the right colour hair) alongside a bright red sports car, the polar opposite of the movie's 1950 Mercury (which is in 4000 pieces by the end of the movie anyway).

Cobra remains one of the most curious movie licenses of the Eighties. Three different games, one of which is vastly superior thanks to the technical brilliance and anarchic humour of its author, while the other two are much like the movie itself: maligned by most, yet admired by a select few. As to the movie: just be grateful we live in a world where both *Beverly Hills Cop* and *Cobra* exist – rather than what would have happened had Stallone had his way: a blunted amalgamation of the two. ★



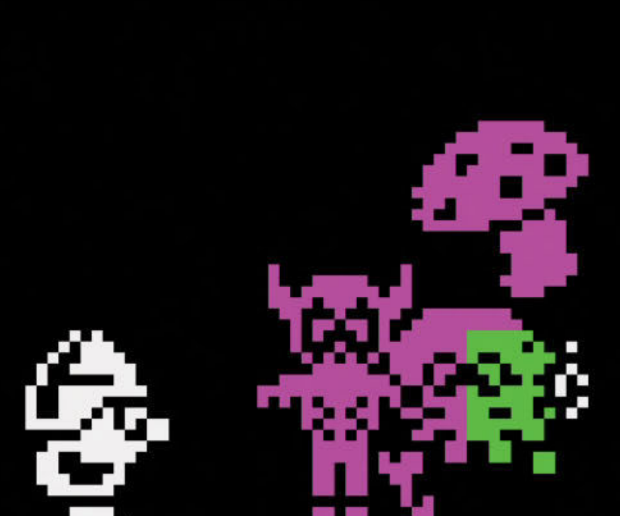
CLASSIC MOMENTS

# Atic Atac

» **PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME » **RELEASED:** 1983

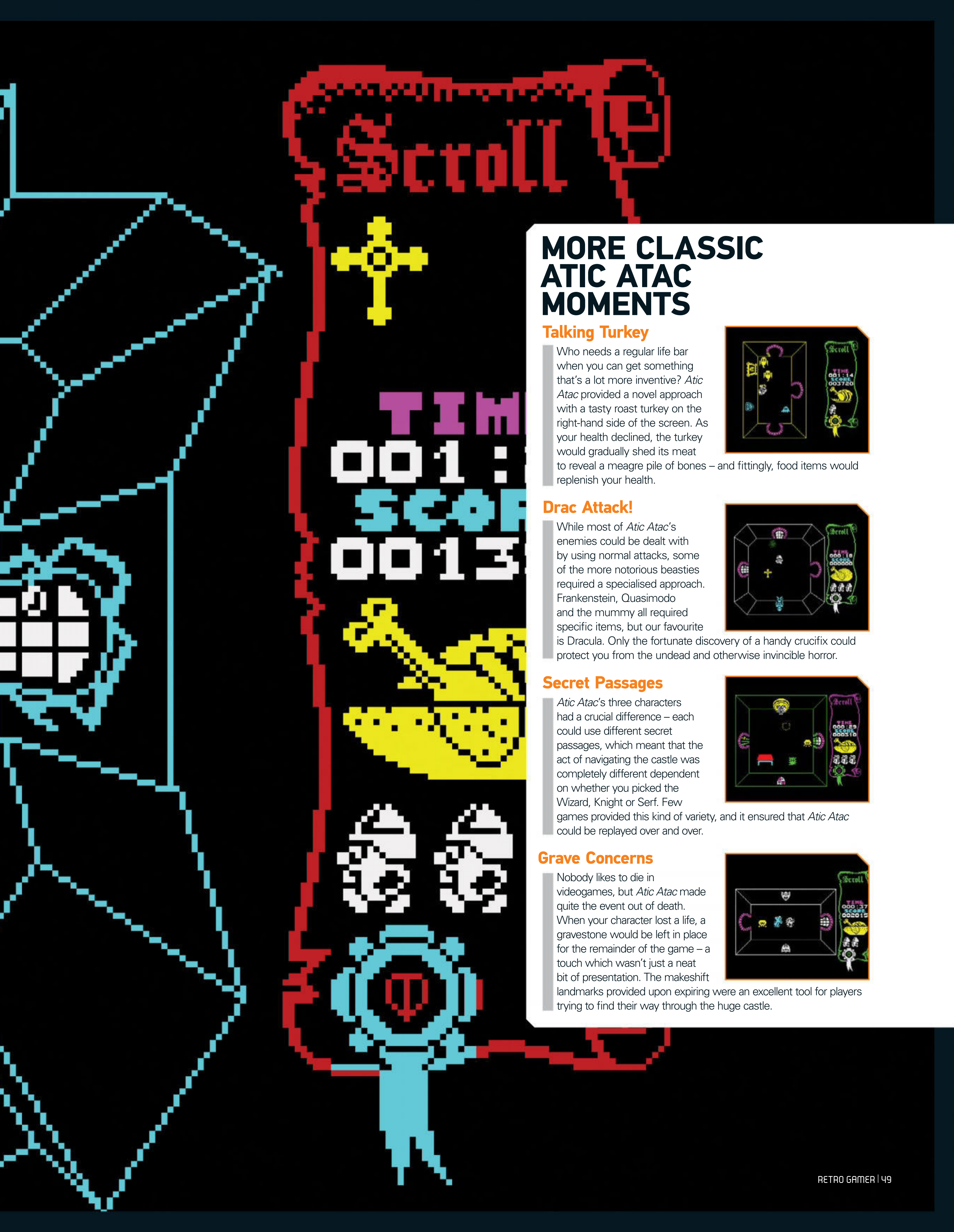
**Ultimate was already a great developer in 1983, but targeting the 16K Spectrum computer had its drawbacks.** *Jetpac* is a great example – it's a wonderful game, but it relies wholly on your twitch shoot-'em-up skills. When players wanted a little bit more depth and variety out of their games, Ultimate wasn't necessarily the company to provide that – or so we thought.

There's a certain moment of realisation that *Atic Atac* isn't quite the same as previous Ultimate games – for us, it came the first time that we ventured down into the caverns. When we began to reach the outer limits of the maze, it became clear that *Atic Atac* was *huge* and that we'd have to put considerable effort into finding our way around. With over 100 rooms split across five floors, that was no easy task and we had to become organised in our approach by making maps – so while previous Ultimate games were neat little arcade adventures, *Atic Atac* turned us into videogame cartographers. *



## BIO

Having established itself as a premier Spectrum developer with the likes of *Jetpac*, Ultimate Play The Game was already a company to look out for – but in late 1983, it took its releases to the next level. By moving on from the comparatively limited 16K Spectrum, Ultimate could produce bigger and more graphically impressive games like *Jetpac*'s sequel *Lunar Jetman* and the all-new *Atic Atac*. The arcade adventure that saw you piecing together a special key to escape a haunted maze captivated critics, earning high praise including a remarkable 9/10 from *C&VG*.



# MORE CLASSIC ATIC ATAC MOMENTS

## Talking Turkey

Who needs a regular life bar when you can get something that's a lot more inventive? *Atic Atac* provided a novel approach with a tasty roast turkey on the right-hand side of the screen. As your health declined, the turkey would gradually shed its meat to reveal a meagre pile of bones – and fittingly, food items would replenish your health.

## Drac Attack!

While most of *Atic Atac*'s enemies could be dealt with by using normal attacks, some of the more notorious beasties required a specialised approach. Frankenstein, Quasimodo and the mummy all required specific items, but our favourite is Dracula. Only the fortunate discovery of a handy crucifix could protect you from the undead and otherwise invincible horror.

## Secret Passages

*Atic Atac*'s three characters had a crucial difference – each could use different secret passages, which meant that the act of navigating the castle was completely different dependent on whether you picked the Wizard, Knight or Serf. Few games provided this kind of variety, and it ensured that *Atic Atac* could be replayed over and over.

## Grave Concerns

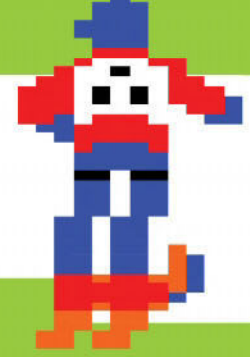
Nobody likes to die in videogames, but *Atic Atac* made quite the event out of death. When your character lost a life, a gravestone would be left in place for the remainder of the game – a touch which wasn't just a neat bit of presentation. The makeshift landmarks provided upon expiring were an excellent tool for players trying to find their way through the huge castle.




# MICROÏDS

In the 14th issue of the French videogame magazine *Tilt,* published in the Summer of 1984, an article entitled "La Puce Aux Oeufs D'Or" glanced over the water at the UK and the USA and spoke of developers reaching the status of superstars in months. "The chip that lays golden eggs", it said, and pointed to a 'digital Hollywood' and, while it was a party to which France was arriving late to, the piece spoke of home-grown talent taking advantage of a the market and encouraged others to get involved.

"Nous recevons beaucoup de cassettes," divulged a young Laurent Weill, knee-deep in tapes at his new office. Laurent had founded the French publisher Loriciel along with Marc Bayle just a few months earlier and he was very keen to discover the talent around him. "Even if a program is not great – which is the most common case – we study it and



## Microïds was one of a flurry of games developers setting up in the early Eighties and, more than 30 years later, it is still going strong. David Crookes takes a look back over the history of the French developer-turned-publisher

advise the author of a way that it can move forward," he told the journalist, Guy Delcourt, before adding an open invitation: "Il ne faut surtout pas avoir peur de venir nous voir"," he said, which, roughly translated, means,"Do not be afraid of coming to see us."

Among those sending cassettes to Loriciel was Elliot Grassiano, a computer enthusiast who began working for defence specialists Sagem in 1979. Elliot had built his first computer in the early Eighties and he was getting a taste of the telecommunications and consumer electronics markets. Keen to get involved in gaming and having purchased a Thomson MO5 computer, he made use of its relative power to create his first game.

"It was called *Space Shuttle Simulator*," Elliot tells us. *Tilt*'s reviewers cast their eye over the game in issue 21 of the magazine a few months later, awarding the graphics four out of five, the sound effects three, the interest-factor a maximum number of points and an overall 'B' rating. "Luckily the game was successful," says Elliot, "And I decided to quit my job as an engineer to create my own development company, Microïds."

Elliot was an intelligent young man. He had attended the sixth form of the respected public secondary school, Lycée Louis-le-Grand in Paris between 1972 and 1974, and he had studied engineering, electronics and computers at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure D'Arts Et Métiers. His game, enthusiasm and approach had impressed both Laurent Weill and Marc Bayle so they, along with Patrick Le Nestour, another engineer with experience in the aerospace industry, helped to get the new company off the ground.

"While creating my own company did not necessarily seem the easiest way to pursue my career, the need to create something personal rather than lock myself into a more routine day job had become more urgent after a few years," Elliot says. Just to be on the safe side, though, the company looked to enter another market, too. "Initially Microïds was going to develop consumer robotics projects," he remembers. It wasn't long before videogames took priority.

The first title created by the new developer was *Air Attack*, published by Loriciel for the Thomson MO5. It was an air combat simulator, drawing on the engineering experience of Microïds' founders, in which the action took place via a split-screen. It sold reasonably well and, just as importantly, provided the basis for some other games. *Grand Prix 500cc,* launched the following year, was created for the Amstrad CPC and it too utilised the vertical split-screen mechanic for two-player racing.

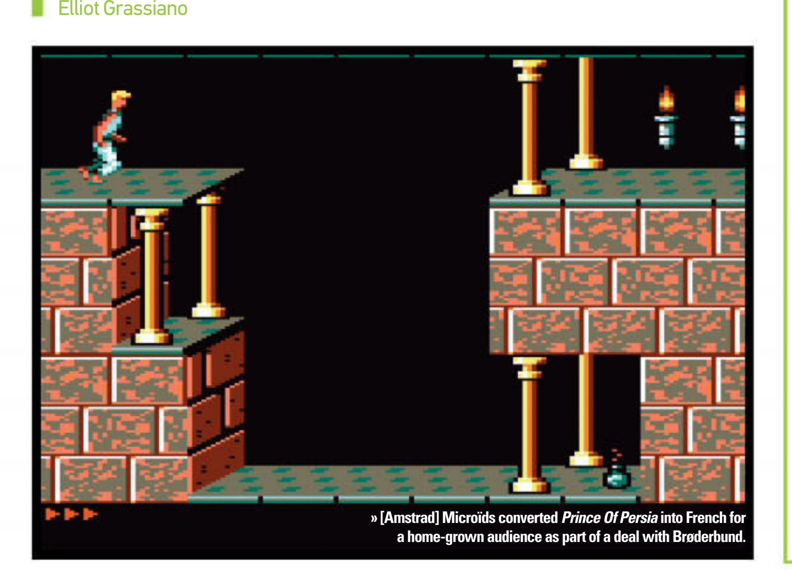


» [DOS] Platformer *Nicky Boom* was a departure from the usual adventure/strategy games by Microïds.

The motorbike simulator had been programmed by Elliot and it incorporated 12 world circuits. Its head-to-head racing caught the imagination of players and the game proved to be a reasonably big hit in France. "I wanted to continue to develop the concepts of *Air Attack* and I turned to racing games which seemed to be one of the most interesting topics for this type of functionality," Elliot says of the decision to make *Grand Prix 500cc*. "Using bikes seemed at the time to be a good niche because it was still fairy unrepresented."

Microïds made the most of the game. A deal between Loriciel and Activision saw it released in the UK the following year and it was also ported ▶

> **"Initially Microïds was going to develop consumer robotics projects"**
> Elliot Grassiano


» [Amstrad] Microïds converted *Prince Of Persia* into French for a home-grown audience as part of a deal with Brøderbund.


» Elliot Grassiano set up Microïds in 1985 having published *Space Shuttle Simulator* with Loriciel.

### IN THE KNOW

- Microïds was set up in Vélizy-Villacoublay in the south-western suburbs of Paris.
- Its name is a linguistic blend of the two words 'microinformatique' and 'androids'.
- Although it was set up as a 'general' developer, it became known for its adventure, sports and strategy games.
- The Amstrad CPC was its primary market in the Eighties.
- Microïds has created successful action games including *Far Gate* and *Nicky Boom*.
- Its games have been successful across the world, with top titles including *Still Life*, *Syberia*, *Atlantis*, *Dracula*, *Egypt*, *Amerzone* and *Obscure* standing out.
- It has one of the world's largest adventure catalogues made up of videogames from the likes of Microïds, Cryo, Index+ and Wanadoo Edition.
- It opened its own online shop, powered by Metaboli – a French online videogame service – offering 50 games in 2008, which has since closed.




# THE CHANGING FACE OF MICROÏDS










to other machines including the Atari ST. At this stage, Microïds did not have any desire to become a publisher itself. "The company did not have the means to publish because it required much greater investment and so we logically concentrated on development," Elliot affirms. It meant the team could be kept small. In 1985, just five people worked at the developer. "They carried out all kinds of development roles and I led the company," Elliot continues.

*Air Attack* and *Grand Prix 500cc* would point the way towards Microïds' future as the company began to grow a reputation for titles which contained an element of realism. The huge success of the Amstrad CPC in France gave it a solid home base – "In France and in Europe, back then, the Amstrad CPC 464 offered the best price/performance ratio and it became important," Elliot recalls – but Microïds also created games for the Commodore 64, DOS and the Atari ST as it broadened its horizons away from its home turf.

*Grand Prix 500cc* was released in America as *Superbike Challenge* and it was a sign that the French developer was keen to widen its ambition. But then it made sense for a French developer to think big. The aforementioned *Tilt* article of July 1984 had pointed out that there were 30 times more computers in America than in France and that sales of games could be between 50 and 100 times more in the States. To survive and flourish, it was a market that needed to be tackled.

> **"The company did not have the means to publish because it required much greater investment and so we logically concentrated on development"** Elliot Grassiano

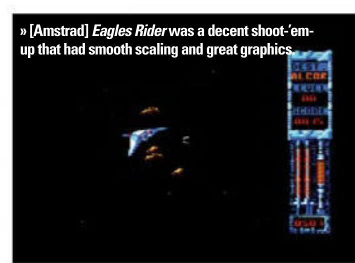
**In order to capitalise on the thirst for games across the Atlantic, Microïds struck a deal with the American publisher Brøderbund** Software which began a fruitful partnership that would last many years. "Brøderbund was our first customer in the United States," Elliot confirms. It would see Microïds' games hit US shelves, among them the skiing game *Super Ski* which borrowed a similar concept to earlier games. Brøderbund renamed it *Downhill Challenge*.

The Eighties also saw the development of games such as the action racer *Chicago 90* in which you could play as a gangster or a cop, the two-player rodeo sim, imaginatively titled *Rodeo*, and the monotonous *Highway Patrol*. *Chicago 90* was released in 1989, created and programmed by Le Nestour. It showed that, even four years after launching the company, the founders were continuing to get stuck in (Elliot contributed titles such as *Quad* in 1987). At the same time, Microïds was looking after Brøderbund's games in France, bringing the likes of *Prince Of Persia* and *Karateka* to the French market that year.

Yet there was another string to Microïds' bow: its growing reliance on adventure titles. "Microïds developed adventure games practically since its creation," says Elliot. Among the first batch was *Oceania*, set on an Earth submerged underwater with only a few



» [Amstrad] Pursue as a cop or be chased as a gangster in the isometric racing game *Chicago 90*.


» [Amstrad] *Eagles Rider* was a decent shoot-'em-up that had smooth scaling and great graphics.



» [Amstrad] *Iron Trackers* was one of Microïds' many racing games, splitting the screen for head-to-head action.

## TIMELINE

1985 – Microïds is founded by Elliott Grassiano and *Oceania* is released.


1986 – *Grand Prix 500cc* becomes the developer's first big hit.


1987 – A deal with Brøderbund Software sees Microïds titles released over in the USA.

Microïds' first 16-bit game was released: a port of *Grand Prix 500cc*.


1988 – Microïds showcases *Iron Trackers* and *Eagle's Rider* at the Festival De La Micro in Paris.


1989 – *Highway Patrol* and *Chicago 90* are released.


1990 – The developer works on translating *Prince Of Persia* into French.

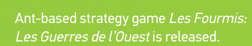

1992 – Microïds stops making games for the CPC, once very much its lead platform.

1993 – The strategy game *Genesia* is published by Mindscape International.


1995 – Microïds expands and ventures into publishing and distribution, as well as still making games.


1997 – The company begins to grow fast and has offices in Italy, the UK and Canada. *Rising Lands* is released.


1999 – It's a good year for strategy fans with Microïds releasing *Amerzone* and *Corsairs: Conquest At Sea*.


2000 – Ant-based strategy game *Les Fourmis: Les Guerres de l'Ouest* is released.

2002 – *Syberia* is released in France. The game would go on to become a classic.


2003 – Microïds merges with MC2, a French software company, and becomes MC2-Microïds.

MC2-Microïds acquires Wanadoo Edition as part of a deal with the French government for Microïds to emerge from bankruptcy protection.


2004 – Microïds Italia becomes Blue Label Entertainment SRL.


2005 – Ubisoft acquires Microïds Canada. Elliott Grassiano leaves the company.


2007 – The Microïds brand is revived and the company lays the groundwork for a new era.


2008 – Microïds acquires the brands and intellectual property of Cryo Interactive and publishes the games of Kheops Studio.


2010 – Anuman Interactive completes its acquisition of the assets and licences of Microïds.


2013 – Elliott returns and later announces Microïds has the licence to develop and publish games based on Agatha Christie.


2016 – The second sequel of the popular *Syberia* series, *Syberia III*, readies for release.

Over the past 30 or so years, Microïds has had a number of logos, each tending to reflect the different eras of the company










scattered islands to explore. Written by Le Nestour, it was released for the Thomson MO5 and TO7 in 1985. A year later, *Les Pyramides D'Atlantys* was unveiled for the Amstrad CPC. Developed by Luc Thibaud, it stuck to a watery theme and involved the player controlling a submarine.

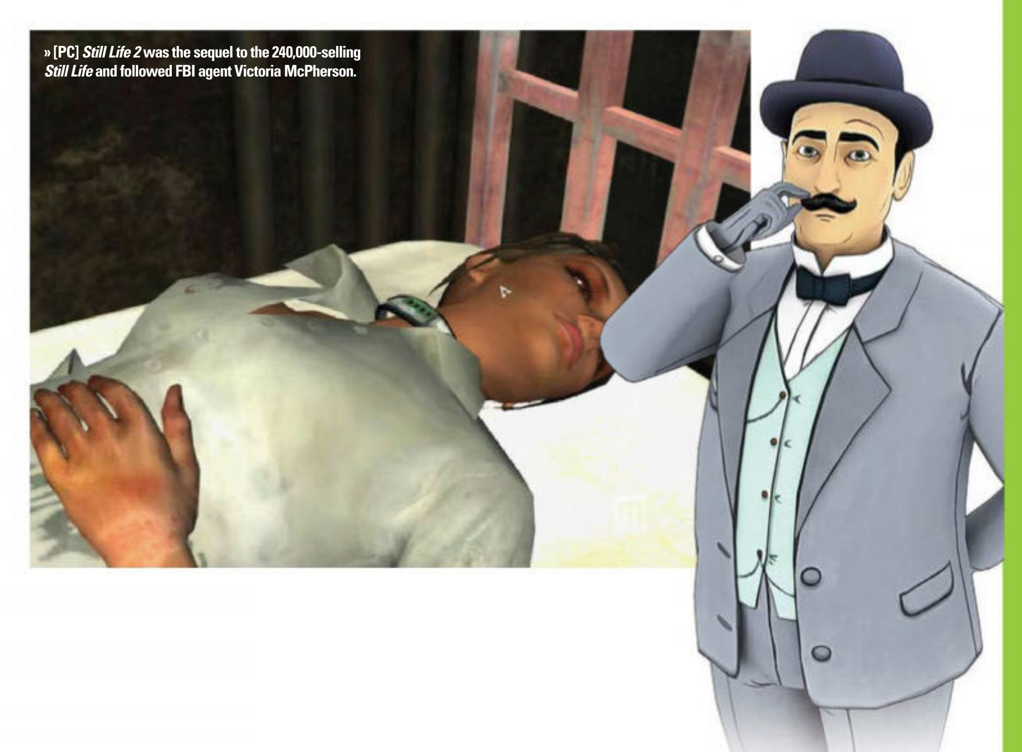
"Adventure and simulation games were Microïds' favourite genres," says Elliot. "Adventure games with a narrative dimension make them highly immersive simulations – they can help to achieve virtually what we could not do in reality. In some way, an adventure game can be considered a 'simulation' of character." The decision to rely so heavily on these genres, he says, was down to his background. "I have a personal taste for simulations and it probably relates to my training as an engineer," he says. "The simulations enable players to virtually achieve what they cannot in reality."

At the Festival De La Micro which took place within the Espace Champerret exhibition centre in Paris between 14 and 16 October 1988, 25,000 visitors had the chance to see a selection of those simulators as well as some action-focussed games. Three of the developer's titles – *Quad*, *Grand Prix 500cc* and *Super Ski* – had been slapped onto a disk (the latter game being used as the focus of a show floor competition which attracted 321 entrants). The company's stand also showcased the racer *Iron Trackers*, the 3D sci-fi shoot-'em-up *Eagle's Rider* and professional simulators for the military.

Staff numbers began to grow in the Nineties and Microïds, in line with most developers, began to move away from 8-bit machines. Team sizes increased in number too as the developer began to rely less on just having a programmer, a graphic designer and invariably a freelancer to create the audio. *Swap* in 1990 brought 90 levels of strategic, puzzling joy to the table, *Sliders* entered the arena of the futuristic sports game in 1991 and *Super Ski II* in 1992 was an inevitable but long-awaited sequel.

But while there were some curveballs thrown in – such as the Amiga, Atari ST and DOS platformer *Nicky Boom* in 1992 and *Les Aventures De Carlos* in 1994 – sport, strategy and adventure dominated. "I am a strong believer in management and optimisation," Elliot explains of his love of strategy. The turn-based strategy game *Genesia* (or *Ultimate Domain* as it was known in English) was developed using AMOS on the Amiga and saw players assume the role of a village chief providing jobs for ▶

» Microïds has the rights to base games on Agatha Christie characters such as Hercule Poirot.


» [PC] *Still Life 2* was the sequel to the 240,000-selling *Still Life* and followed FBI agent Victoria McPherson.

# DEFINING GAMES

## Grand Prix 500cc 1987

An *Amtix* magazine writer praised many aspects of *Grand Prix 500cc* when this racer was released in the UK, not least for having the "closest representation of an engine I have heard on a micro". In truth, the audio was awful, but maybe that's apt for a game that not only split the screen but sliced opinion in half too. While it could be enjoyed by one or two players and offered a range of modes, *Amstrad Action* scorned the game for its control.



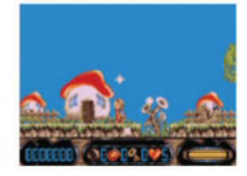
## Super Ski 1987

This speedy, gorgeous-looking, five-player 3D skiing classic was named *Downhill Challenge* in the USA and *Eddie Edwards Super Ski* in the UK, thanks to the antics of the British ski-jumper in the 1988 Winter Olympics. It also found itself on the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64 as well as France's favourite Amstrad CPC, in each case allowing players to enjoy downhill, slalom, giant slalom and ski jump modes.



## Nicky Boom 1992

At around the time of the launch of *Nicky Boom* in 1992, gaming mascots ranging from Sonic to Titus were exploding in popularity. But although *Nicky Boom* sold well enough to earn itself a sequel, this side-scrolling platformer fell short of becoming a classic. It at least showed that Microïds wasn't just about sports, strategy and adventure and, while it ticked all the cutesy boxes, it also proved itself to have intelligent level design.



## Amerzone 1999

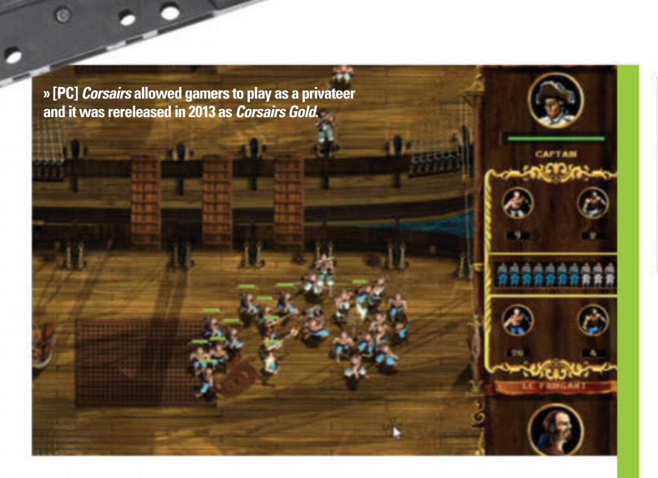
Benoît Sokal played a major role in defining the midlife output of Microïds. He tapped into his acclaimed Inspector *Canardo* comic strip *L'Amerzone* (albeit with humans, not anthropomorphic animals) and he centred this million-selling game on a young journalist seeking to solve the mystery of the mystical White Birds. It may have been short, sometimes confusing and light on character interaction, but it looked amazing.



## Syberia 2002

Microïds' most successful game to date. There is no doubt why fans are eagerly awaiting the second sequel due this year. This is the pinnacle of Microïds' dedication to adventure games which stretches back to the likes of *Oceania* and *Les Pyramides d'Atlantys*. Lawyer Kate Walker drives along an intriguing story set in a French Alps town called Valadilene as she hunts for the heir of a toy factory owner in order to push through a takeover.




» [PC] *Corsairs* allowed gamers to play as a privateer and it was rereleased in 2013 as *Corsairs Gold*.

# THE DNA OF MICROIDS

## Amstrad CPC



Although Microïds' first games were for the Thomson home computers, the CPC was France's bestselling micro in the Eighties. It's not surprising, then, that all of Microïds' major releases were available on the machine.

## Adventures




The creation of *Oceania* for the Thomson computers kickstarted Microïds' association with adventure genre which continues to this day. Not only has the company been one of the most prolific producers of point-and-clicks, its current catalogue bulges with third-party titles too.

## Realism



Elliot Grassiano did not tend to follow industry trends and instead went with his instinct and personal taste. As a former engineer, he tended to steer Microïds towards having an element of 'real life' in its games be it through strategy, sport or adventure.

## Ambition



For the first ten years of its existence, Microïds concentrated on building its library of games, becoming an expert developer in the process. It forged alliances with other companies such as Brøderbund and eventually moved into publishing too, always with an eye to the future.

## Syberia



The adventure game *Syberia* is very much within the core of Microïds and every time the company makes a move in relation to the franchise – whether it's setting up a website or releasing tidbits of information – the adventure gaming world takes notice.

## Takeovers



The Noughties was possibly the most eventful decade of Microïds' corporate life, with plenty of acquisitions taking place that ultimately changed the make-up of the company. It eventually pulled through to become a strong part of the French development and publishing scene once more.

> **"I left Microïds in 2005 shortly after the merger was made with MC2, due to sharp differences over the strategy of the new entity"** Elliot Grassiano

settlers. There were also more skiing games and compilations.

All of this led to a bumper financial harvest for the developer which was now looking to flex its muscle and finally become a publisher too. In 1995, Microïds not only changed its logo, it began to complement its offices near Paris, with new openings in Milan, Milton Keynes and Montreal, creating Microïds Italia, Microïds UK and Microïds Canada. The Canadian division was the only sole development office, with the others having staff dealing with publishing, sales and distribution.

"The move to publishing happened when the company had the right means and distribution place," says Elliot. "It gave the company its autonomy and it led to a increase in revenues which helped raise funds and a continuation of growth." In 1997, Microïds achieved a turnover of 20 million francs (around £2.3 million) which was 50 per cent higher than in 1996.

"In 1997, there were about 20 people working at Microïds and we had dozens in external studios," says Elliot. "It was at this time that we obtained capital and the financial input gave the company the resources to develop and invest. It allowed us to increase staff and turnover by ten times between 1997 and 2002."

At around this time, Microïds was branching out to work on various new consoles. Games such as the adventure title *Secret Mission* in 1996 not only appeared on DOS but on Philips CD-i too. Another adventure game, *Evidence: The Last Report* was created for DOS, Windows and PlayStation. Strategy and adventure titles were pouring from the studios: *Rising Lands* was a futuristic fantasy-based real-time strategy game released in 1997 about an Earth destroyed by a comet; *Amerzone* was a first-person fantasy graphic adventure game based on a 1986 Inspector *Canardo* comic strip *L'Amerzone*. That game had been designed by the comic artist Benoît Sokal and he would become influential to Microïds' success in the Noughties.

**The company was also publishing a good number of games, among them Nivai Entertainment's *Rage*** *Of Mages*, Visual Impact's *Halloween Racer* for the Game Boy Color and EMG's *Speed Demons* on Windows. It had also introduced the pirate strategy title *Corsairs: Conquest At Sea* and the expansion disk *Corsairs: The New Conquerors*, for Windows. The stunning-looking 3D real-time strategy game *Les Fourmis*, based on the book of the same name by Bernard Werber, was delayed from its initial 1999 release date but was finally aired in 2000. Its huge development team, headed by the director Didier Poulain, showed the scale the company was operating at.

A new distribution deal had been signed with Monolith Software, too, and



the company's game were reaching Asia. The Canadian base was becoming increasingly important as well and it was there, in 2002, that Benoît Sokal once again joined forces with Microïds and helped to design the adventure game *Syberia*. He introduced to the world a lawyer called Kate Walker called to wrap up a toy factory takeover only to become embroiled in trying to find the brother of the factory owner who has died, a task that turns her life on its head as she treks across a steampunk vision of Eastern Europe. Costing 2 million euros and created using Virtools Development Environment 2.1, it became an multiple-award winner.

As if to underline the importance of the Montréal base, by 2003 the company was reportedly employing more than 200 people and 105 of them were in Canada. Yet that year, the developer-turned-publisher merged with MC2 and became known as MC2-Microïds. Later that year, MC2-Microïds acquired Wanadoo Edition, which had been created in September 2000 through the merger of Index+ and France Telecom Multimedia Edition.

It marked a few years of change. In 2004, the same year that a sequel to *Syberia* was released, Microïds Italia split from the company and was renamed Blue Label Entertainment SRL. The Milton Keynes base was closed and Elliot also decided to depart. "I left Microïds in 2005 shortly after the merger was made with MC2, due to sharp differences over the strategy of the new entity," Elliot tells us.

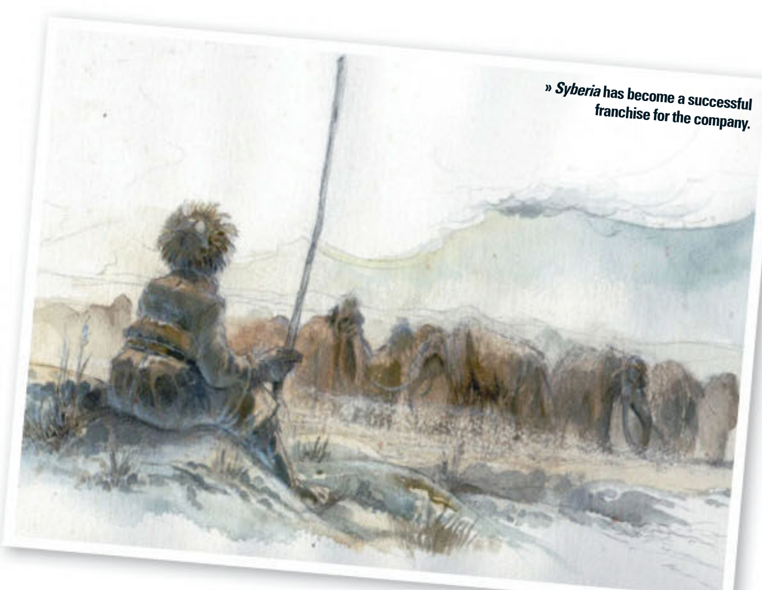
Emmanuel Olivier, who had founded Index+, became CEO of the new group and the Microïds name began to fall out of favour. But then, in 2007, there was something of a change of heart. Olivier decided to relaunch the Microïds label and, the following year, bought the brands of Cryo Interactive which had been declared bankrupt six years earlier, helping to boost the catalogue of games at Microïds' disposal.

In 2009, a French videogame publisher and distributor called Anuman Interactive SA was in the process of being bought by comic specialists Média-Participations. Anuman, in turn, then began looking for acquisitions of its own. It sought to snap up Microïds licences and a deal was concluded on 1 January 2010. This gave Microïds a new lease of life. A special brand for non-adventure titles called Microïds Games For All was formed and the new company looked to make the most of the back catalogue at its disposal. The move had also been noted by Elliot. "I joined Anuman Interactive in 2013, shortly after it acquired the Microïds back catalogue and with that came the will to revive adventure and simulation game titles," he says of his return to the Microïds fold.

Since then *Agatha Christie – The ABC Murders* on PS4, Xbox One, PC and Mac has been released. "Hercule Poirot is simulated and the player is suitably rewarded for behaving closer to how the character would behave in the novels," says Elliot. *The ABC Murders* will soon be followed by *Moto Racer 4* and *Yesterday Origins*, which continues the point-and-click adventures of John Yesterday from the 2012 game that bore his surname.

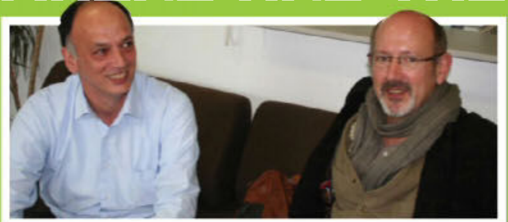
Elliot couldn't be more pleased especially given the company is also working on *Syberia III* which he says is the developers' most successful and bestselling franchise. "We know that many fans have been waiting for the return of the heroine, Kate Walker, for a long time," he says. "We put a lot of effort and budget into the development of this title."

With a host of games converted to iPhone and Android, it has all but secured Microïds immediate future Other older Microïds games look likely to be dusted down for fresh new audiences and new games are now being made. "It's the beginning of a new era for Microïds which has just celebrated its 30th year of existence," Elliot tells us, excitedly. "It's quite a feat in the ruthless world of the videogame industry." ✱



» *Syberia* has become a successful franchise for the company.

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



### Elliot Grassiano (left)

Elliot now runs the Microïds label for Anuman (holding the title of business unit VP) and he is also the CEO of Blue Label Entertainment SRL which used to be Microïds Italia before it split away. Currently, Elliot is overseeing the production of *Syberia III*, the second sequel to the company's most successful game, and his focus is very much on adventure titles. In his second spell working under the Microïds brand, he has seen the release of the point-and-click mobile, PC and Mac game *Dream Chamber* as well as *Agatha Christie – The ABC Murders*.

### Benoît Sokal (right)

Benoît Sokal left Microïds following his work on *Amerzone*, *Syberia* and *Syberia II* and he went on to found his own development company, White Bird Productions. He did this with three other former Microïds developers – Olivier Fontenay, Jean-Phillipe Messian and Michel Bams. White Birds and Microïds continued to work together on games such as the point-and-click adventure *Sinking Island* in 2007, but the company folded in 2010. Shortly after, Sokal began to work with Microïds on the long-awaited *Syberia III*.

### Laurant Weill

After leaving Loriciel – the company he founded and which was the first point of contact for Elliot Grassiano – Laurant Weill went on to found Visiware where he is currently executive chairman. Visiware provides interactive games for paid television and it has worked with Sky Digital as well as on television shows such as *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* and *The Million Pound Drop*, making use of second-screen play-along technology and techniques.

### Emmanuel Olivier

After leaving Microïds in 2010, Emmanuel Olivier became president of Ubiant, a role he continues to hold today. Ubiant designs home energy management technology and its goal is to develop so-called 'ambient intelligence' which seeks to improve living conditions, while preserving the planet's resources.




**The 35th anniversary of the VIC-20 is the perfect time to re-evaluate its importance in the history of home computing. Andrew Fisher looks back with Michael Tomczyk and Albert Charpentier from Commodore, and looks to the future with the homebrew scene**

# KICKING

**Attempts to create a PET successor had stalled. Before a meeting of Commodore managers near London in April 1980 Jack Tramiel had to forge** a new strategy. Michael Tomczyk, former army captain and marketing consultant, had just joined Commodore as Jack's assistant. "My first official day on the job was at the London meeting. Jack and I had discussed the need for a small introductory computer like Atari was trying to launch. We felt this was a vacant niche but the strategy was smart." In the meeting with the managers, this low-cost computer was not favoured. "Most of those around the table wanted a colour business computer and were strongly opposed [to our idea]. Jack told the group, 'I want to make computers for the masses, not the classes' – which became his iconic slogan," Michael remembers.

On returning to America, Michael wrote a 30-page memo detailing what the new computer should be. "I had an extensive background as a product launch consultant and felt concerned that, given Commodore's weak marketing, the new computer was at risk of falling short. I emphasised the need for an RS232 interface (for communications), a full typewriter-style keyboard, memory expansion, game cartridges, IEEE interface, and function keys. I proposed calling this the 'Commodore Spirit', with a retail price of $299.95 – because most personal computers cost $600 or more. Jack read the memo, showed it around the company, and came back to me a few days later. 'Michael, I've told everyone that they have to check with you on anything to do with the new computer,' he said. 'So you have to make it happen. It won't be easy, because no one involved works for you, so you'll have to use persuasion, but I know you can do that.'

"I told everyone involved my Prime Directive: this must be a *user-friendly* computer. Most people then still thought of computers as mainframes or workstations," Michael continues. "I saw an Atari product that had the trademarked slogan, 'Computers For People'. So I ran to the lawyer – 'Can they trademark a common phrase like that?' The lawyers assured me they ▶




» William Shatner and Michael Tomczyk on the set of the VIC-20 adverts.

» Chuck Peddle and Dick Sanford among the Commodore managers at the meeting in April 1980.

© Michael Tomczyk

could, so I immediately exclaimed, 'Then I'm going to trademark 'The Friendly Computer'!' We did and it became the theme in our advertising and packaging." The advertising featured William Shatner, most famous for portraying Captain Kirk. "We had a high-powered Madison Avenue-style advertising team. I met Bill at the first shoot in New York – he was gracious, smooth, friendly, and very professional. I showed him how to use the computer, which, ironically, was the first time he had used one. I couldn't resist getting a photo taken of me and Bill."

Albert Charpentier designed the MOS 6560 Video Interface Chip (VIC), central to the VIC-20 computer. "It was the first video controller to allow direct access of the RAM by both a CPU and video controller by sharing the access on alternate cycles," explains Albert. "The RAM had to run faster but that unleashed the entire frame time for the CPU to operate on the RAM. So by timing the writes to the graphic RAM area correctly, once an area was displayed, it could be reused."

The VIC chip provided three square wave channels and a noise channel (ideal for explosions), and handled analogue input on the VIC-20's single joystick port – allowing access to paddles and a light pen. Albert says, "The VIC chip was designed to be a game system with alphanumeric capability as well. Sound is very important for a good game and the light pen was initially meant for a first-person shooter game."

Michael Tomczyk earned himself the title 'VIC Czar'. "I defined or signed off on almost every aspect of the VIC, including the packaging and user manual (which I coauthored, although my name doesn't appear on it). We were planning to use 'Commodore Spirit' but Tony Tokai told me we couldn't because 'spirit' in Japan didn't mean a positive feeling or friendly cartoonish ghost – it was more likely to be interpreted as a ghoulish soul-eating monster from Hell. Yikes! So I decided to call it the VIC-20, from Albert's chip. When Jack asked why I added the number '20' I replied, 'Because VIC sounds like the name of a truck driver and 20 is a friendly number.' Jack smiled and agreed."

Michael spent time in Japan, working with manager Tony Tokai and engineer Yash Terakura (both of whom would go on to greater involvement in the C64). "On my first visit, I told Yash that this had to be a 'friendly computer' and Yash immediately shot back, 'Michael-san, this will be a friendly computer because I am a friendly engineer!' Tony became a friend during the London meeting." Spotting an NEC computer with its orange function keys at a consumer event, Michael added them to the VIC, making them vertical rather than horizontal. The computer was launched in Japan first as the VIC-1001, following the PET 2001. Working with Tony and Yash were college students interested in computing, including Satoru Iwata and the founders of developer HAL Laboratory.

There is a misconception Commodore was not interested in games, but Michael was determined to launch the VIC with quality titles. "I had been a captain in the army and had experienced combat in Vietnam – so I decided to call our team the 'VIC Commandos' to reflect the revolutionary nature of what we were doing and give the team confidence. They wrote a 400-page Programmer's Reference Guide – the first of its kind – which gave software developers the technical information they needed. Andy Finkel edited the manual and we did a similar guide for the C64. This was my solution

> **"VIC sounds like the name of a truck driver and 20 is a friendly number"**
> Michael Tomczyk

## HEAD TO HEAD: ZX81 VS. VIC-20

| | SINCLAIR ZX81 | COMMODORE VIC-20 |
|---|---|---|
| PROCESSOR | Zilog Z80A | MOS 6502 |
| SPEED | 3.5 MHz | 1 MHz |
| RAM | 1K | 5K (3.5K for programming) |
| RAM EXPANSION | 16K official, up to 64K third-party | 16K official, up to 40K third-party |
| ROM | 16K | 20K |
| RESOLUTION | 64x48 pixels (32x24 characters) | 176x184 pixels (22x32 characters) |
| COLOURS | Monochrome | 16 |
| SOUND CHANNELS | None, sound via casette interface | 3 square wave, 1 noise |
| SOUND RANGE | None | 5 octaves |
| JOYSTICK PORT | None | 1 |
| CARTRIDGE PORT | No | Yes |
| CASSETTE PLAYER | Any tape player | Dedicated Datasette |
| DISK DRIVES | No | Yes |
| KEYBOARD | 40 key membrane | 66 key solid |
| UK LAUNCH PRICE | £69.95 assembled (£239 at 2016 prices) | £199.99 (£776 at 2016 prices) |



© Michael Tomczyk

» A photo of the VIC Commandos and Michael Tomczyk (back right), promoting the VIC-20 in 1981.



» In addition to cassettes, the VIC-20 was also capable of using cartridges. This is a port of the arcade game *Omega Race*.

to the problem of 'no software' which had plagued Commodore, and it resulted in an explosion of third-party software worldwide."

In March 1981 the VIC-20 went on sale in America with 12 games written by the Commandos. "The VIC-20 was the first full-featured, affordable home computer. It had a smooth modern case design, unlike the industrial designs that most personal computers had. The programmable function keys allowed software developers maximum capability to customise applications," Michael concludes.

**The first milestone was its price. The VIC-20 was the first computer to sell for below $300 in the USA, and the first computer stocked by American** retailer Kmart. Michael points out another effect of Commodore's strategy. "Japanese companies were planning to enter the US market with a $600 personal computer. When we launched the VIC-20 for under $300 this caused the Japanese to stop and rethink. By the time they had a 32K computer to enter the US market, we hit them again with the Commodore 64 for around $500. This sent them back to the drawing board and the Japanese never entered the low-end market."

The second milestone was sales. Michael says proudly, "The VIC-20 became the first microcomputer to sell a million units. This achievement is often misreported or not even credited, but that is a fact. The important thing is that Commodore jump-started the home computer revolution." It took just under 12 months for the VIC-20 to hit its milestone; the Apple II took almost five years to reach one million.

Many have forgotten Commodore's importance to online computing but the VIC was an important part of it. "The built-in RS-232 port allowed the VIC-20 to be used with a modem and in 1981 I commissioned an engineering firm to design the VICModem – the first modem priced under $100, and the first to sell one million units," says Michael. In the early days of CompuServe, the Commodore Information Network was one of the busiest areas.

But did Commodore end up 'killling off' the VIC-20? Albert does not think so. "Successful companies obsolete their products before the competition catches up. If Commodore had waited maybe the C64 would not have been so successful since another company could have grabbed market share." As the C64 launched, Albert left Commodore. "After the C64, I proposed the Commodore 80 with a built-in colour display and floppy drive: not very far from the Apple Macintosh but a year earlier. Commodore decided to pursue the Plus/4. I did not agree and I left with Bob Yannes and Charles Winterbele in August 1982."

By 1985, production was discontinued after 2.5 million sales. Founder Jack Tramiel had joined rival Atari and Michael Tomczyk left six months later. "I took notes wherever I was during my Commodore years, because I knew someday I would write a book about my experiences. I told Jack and he agreed, but when Jack left he told me, 'Don't write my story – write *your* story' – so *The Home Computer Wars* tells what happened at Commodore from my point of view. Currently, I'm preparing an expanded version of the book and working with a colleague on a film script." In its early years, the VIC-20 was a proving ground for many famous developers, including Jeff Minter and John Romero, but even today, the system still has plenty to offer… ▶

» The function keys are on the right-hand side of the keyboard, just like the later Commodore 64.

» Jack Tramiel and Michael Tomczyk mark one million VIC-20 sales.

© Michael Tomczyk

# COLLECTOR'S CORNER

**Mat Allen has taken over efforts to preserve VIC-20 software with Gamebase 20**



**When did you start collecting?**
I didn't own [a VIC-20] until 2003. I was already collecting cartridges for the C64, so I thought I'd start collecting similar for the VIC-20. A significant portion of titles that only have a handful of known copies are proving elusive.

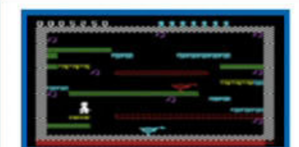
**What is the rarest item you have found?**
A number of titles I own are the only known copy. There are probably more, living in some basement or box in a loft, but you can only go on what people say they possess or what exists in some digital archive. A lot of games only sold locally or distributed by mail order are not easy to find, especially in the US. The 'very rare' titles would be *Key Quest*, *Anteater*, *Witch Way*, *Type Sniper*, *Flip 'N Match*, *Cribbage*, Sega's *Frogger*, quite a few Mr Computer cartridges, and Llamasoft's *Bomb Buenos Aires*. I can't go by without mentioning *Ultima: Escape From Mount Drash*, to which I possess one of only four complete copies.

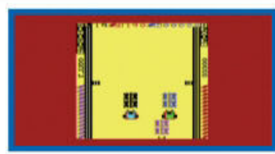
**When did you start work on Gamebase20?**
I did not create Gamebase20. A guy called Dirk in the Netherlands put together the first release in 2005. I offered to take on the project from him. Releases tend to be around every four years, so the next update should hit sometime in 2017.

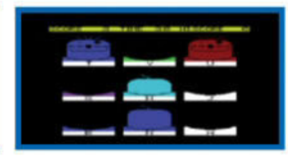
**Have you preserved any unknown titles?**
There are a number of titles only in the archive because I paid to purchase and transfer them. A couple of Tymac releases, *Anteater* by Romox, *Chicken Challenge* by Micro Antics, and two early Jeff Minter titles, to name but a few. Hopefully I can also get some missing dumps from Bo Kvamme, who has a substantial collection.

**What would be your dream discovery?**
Anything that Ward Shrake dumped that I don't own. Anything else that dK'Tronics released by Jeff Minter that isn't preserved yet. A shrink-wrapped copy of *Ultima: Escape From Mount Drash*!

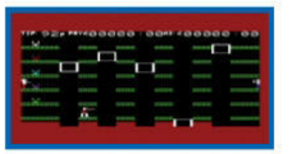
# ESSENTIAL VIC-20 EXCLUSIVES











### THE PERILS OF WILLY

■ It wouldn't be a **Retro Gamer** feature without mentioning Matthew Smith and *Manic Miner*, would it? 16K of memory was needed for this VIC-exclusive instalment in Miner Willy's story, programmed by John Chaytor for Software Projects. 33 unique screens filled with wacky enemies needed to be conquered, to the tune of *Stairway To Heaven*.

### CHARIOT RACE

■ The Making Of *Chariot Race* appeared in issue 92 of **Retro Gamer**. This was a unique one or two-player game of wheel-to-wheel action, viewed from overhead. Overtaking rivals or pushing them into a collision was needed to succeed. Passing enough rivals allowed the player to reach the finishing line, but fireballs took out slow racers.

### MOLE ATTACK

■ Taking inspiration from *Whack-A-Mole*, this cute game added a twist. Against a ticking timer, the player must hammer the moles as they pop up to earn points. Earning enough points extends the time available, but hit the mole's bottom and points are deducted. The only conversion – for the Commodore Max – was published in Japan.

### ULTIMA: ESCAPE FROM MT. DRASH

■ Famous for being rare, Keith Zabalaoui created this VIC exclusive after working with Richard Garriott on the early *Ultima* titles. Imprisoned under Mount Drash, the player viewed the randomly-generated dungeons in 3D (with an overhead map) and fought enemies encountered in a simple side-on view.

### WACKY WAITERS

■ This tricky platformer was created by Eugene Evans, promoted as the big-earning whizz kid by Imagine. The waiter collected the order from a customer on the right, went back to the kitchen on the left and then delivered the correct food for a tip. Standing in the way were five constantly moving lifts and the occasionally drunk customer.

# VIC-20 GAMES THAT TOP THE C64 VERSION











### OMEGA RACE

■ Andy Finkel was one of the VIC Commandos, creating launch software for the VIC, and went on to be a key C64 programmer. This cartridge-based conversion of the Bally arcade game was fantastic on both formats. Andy's approach simulated the vector graphics through characters rather than drawing lines. While the C64 version was good, the VIC version felt great.

### MATRIX

■ "Most of Jeff's VIC-20 games are better than the corresponding C64 versions," says Mat Allen. This *Gridrunner* sequel was published as *Attack Of The Mutant Camels* in the US. Minter polished the presentation and fixed gameplay issues (notably the ability to 'camp' out of harm's way, as the Snitch points you out). The playing area of the VIC original makes it more intense than the C64.

### SNAKE PIT

■ An early effort from Mike Singleton for Postern Software, before *Lords Of Midnight* made him famous. A screen full of dots also contained slithering snakes. As the snakes ate through the dots, the screen became a moving maze and they chased the player – who earned points for every dot collected. The VIC version triumphs with fewer snakes and by being more responsive.

### DEMON ATTACK

■ Many will know this shoot-'em-up from third party developer Imagic, formed by Rob Fulop. It was hit with a lawsuit over similarities to *Phoenix*, but ultimately released across multiple formats. The C64 version unwisely added a fussy background (with stars and a planet), obscuring the action at times. The VIC screen was uncluttered and everything moved at a good pace.

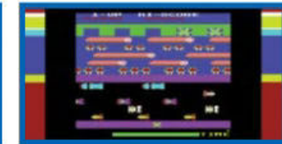
### KEY-QUEST

■ Tymac gained fame for its 'Talkies' – games that utilised sampled speech on the C64 – but *Key Quest 64* does not say much good of Tymac's conversion skills. The earlier VIC version worked fluidly with small graphics as the player explored the maze, picking up treasures to reveal the key to escape. A VIC rarity that has been preserved for others to play.

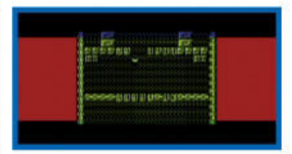
# ESSENTIAL VIC-20 HOMEBREW











### VICDOOM

■ Kweepa (Steve McCrea) amazed VIC users with his first-person exploration game *The Keep* and this incredible conversion of the classic FPS. *VICDoom* recreated the nine maps from *Doom*'s shareware episode *Knee-Deep In The Dead* and even included the automap function. Four enemy types, four weapons and recreations of the original *Doom* music combine to impress.

### ASTRO NELL

■ Mat Simmonds proved what could be done with an unexpanded VIC – a gigantic flick-screen map that's almost as big as *Jet Set Willy*. Our space-suited heroine, the titular Astro Nell, must collect energy units from around an asteroid, hampered by her short oxygen supply. Cute graphics and overall good design make this a platform delight, published on tape by Cronosoft.

### FROGGER '07

■ When an arcade conversion is done well, its the gameplay that always shines through, and that's the case with *Frogger '07* created by Glen Richards. All of the familiar features are there (diving turtles, the bonus flies to catch) and all of the old tactics still work. Polished and addictive with graphics that come close to the original, this is definitely not a game to be missed.

### DRAGONWING

■ Aleksei Eeben was another skilled programmer that mastered the unexpanded VIC computer. With *Dragonwing* we have a fast horizontally-scrolling action game filling the screen and border, with the player dodging the scenery and picking up extra fuel from the shifting landscape to keep going. The pounding music keeps you coming back to score more points.

### SUPER STARSHIP SPACE ATTACK

■ A shoot-'em-up with strategy elements from Misfit (Mika Keränen). Scroll up and down the maze-like levels, shooting out blocks and enemies to locate the three power units. Collect them and get back to the exit safely. Great presentation (with messages cleverly appearing in the landscape) and three difficulty levels enhance the game.

The modern VIC scene centres on the Denial website (sleepingelephant.com/denial). "The VIC seems to be gaining momentum with many exciting projects in development," says Jeff Daniels, who started the site after running the *Denial* fanzine in the Nineties. "I am charmed by its limitations and idiosyncrasies. You know a VIC-20 program when you see it, which draws a unique type of hobbyist. I make BASIC games for 3.5 kilobytes of memory exclusively." Jeff's titles include *Ten, Improbable War,* and *Game Theory*. "*Game Theory* is a remake of an idea I explored years ago. It's a one-button, Skinner box experiment that would fall into the micro-game collection genre."

Cronosoft was started by Simon Ullyatt. "In 2002 I was at a loose end after editing the Oric-1/Atmos fanzine *Rhetoric*. Being a fan of independently-produced music, I put forward the idea of an independent, not-for-profit software house." Among his VIC-20 releases are *Astro Nell, Theater Of War, Blue Star,* and *Vicolumn*. Simon says, "Our latest release *Super Starship Space Attack* is my personal favourite. It shows impressive skills including proper music, parallax full screen-scrolling, and really great gameplay."

Mika Keränen (Misfit) bought a VIC in 2013 to start coding; he created *Super Starship Space Attack*. "[The VIC-20] is a weird senile grandpa who needs more homebrew love. I wanted my childhood back and it's my time machine. I'm too old to become inspired about new devices. In the early Eighties I was too young to make reasonable games. Now I'm older I'd like to know what I can do with these forgotten beasts."

**"It's a weird senile grandpa who needs some more homebrew love"**

Mika Keränen

Steve McCrea (Kweepa) created the sensational *VICDoom*. "*Doom* was a formative experience for me. It pushed me into making games professionally when I was at university. Plus it seemed like an interesting challenge. How much could I get in and how close could I get to the original?" Steve uses cross-development tools and emulation to program for the VIC. "I admire anyone still coding on the VIC. It was able to squeeze a lot of fun into a small package. The lack of dedicated graphics and sound commands encouraged users to experiment. The VIC chip with its screen sizing and positioning was amazing." Steve's future plans include porting *Chuckie Egg* and a 3D game inspired by *Ultima Underworld*.

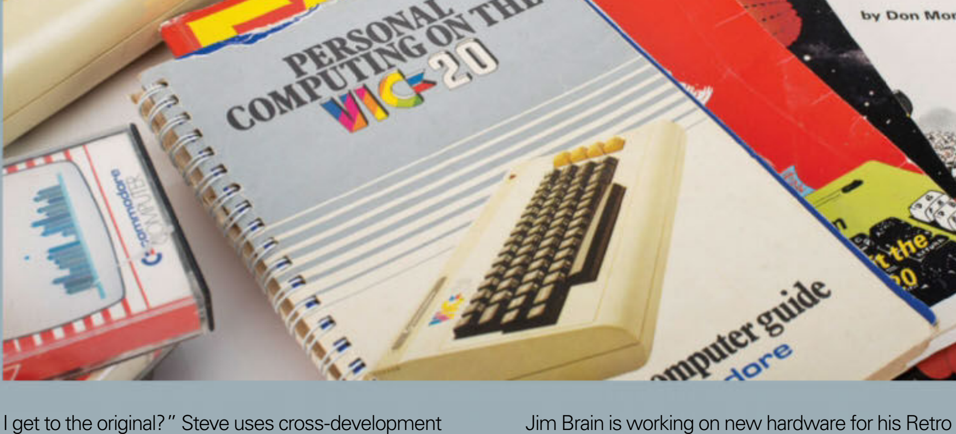
Anders Persson (Boray) echoes the experience of many VIC users. "The VIC-20 was my first encounter with the magical world of computers. Much of that magic is still there." The VIC-20 was handed down from his older brother in 1987, but he started seriously programming in 2000.

Martijn Wenting of Revival Studios (revival-studios.com) is another coder who released games on tape. "It's unlike anything else: the squeezed resolution, the games, and the limited memory. I find it aesthetically pleasing." Martijn's stylish games include *Rush* and *Avalanche*. "I admire all coders dedicated to making new games for VIC. I'm a fan of Aleksei Eeben, as he focuses on the original unexpanded system, like myself."

Jim Brain is working on new hardware for his Retro Innovations store. (store.go4retro.com) "I'll never know if I would have chosen a career in computing had I not acquired the VIC-20 in 1982, but having it created a career path for me," he says. His new VICMIDI cartridge is a first for VIC users, in collaboration with Leif Bloomquist. But why is he is still interested in working on the VIC? "It is an easier machine to interface with, and thus design for," Jim replies. It's a first love, and I don't think it gets as much notice from hardware manufacturers."

The C64 ultimately overshadowed it, sure, but, despite that, the VIC-20 holds a unique place in gaming history and still continues to surprise coders and enthusiasts alike after 35 years. *

**With thanks to everyone taking part, and to Michael Tomczyk and Richard Lagendijk (commodore-info.com) for the images.**









» A pair of Commodore paddles could attach to the VIC's joystick port.




# Top Gear

## THE NEED FOR SPEED

RETROREVIVAL

» SNES » GREMLIN GRAPHICS » 1992

**If *Top Gear* looks a little familiar to you it's because it shares a lot of DNA with the rather excellent Lotus series, which was originally a hit on 16-bit computers such as the Amiga.**

Like *Lotus Esprit*, *Top Gear* features a split-screen mode, regardless of whether you're playing on your own or against a friend. It feels annoying initially, as if you're wasting precious screen space, but you soon get used to it, particularly as the racing itself is so satisfying and everything runs at a tremendously fast pace. The music is also connected, with musician Barry Leitch (who worked on some of the earlier *Lotus* games) remixing a selection of classic *Lotus* tunes to great success. The original tracks were good, but they sound even better here, punchier and bassy with excellent stereo effects and great engine sounds that really put you in the heat of the action.

Gameplay-wise, *Top Gear* is pretty conventional, essentially consisting of circuit racing across eight different countries. Each available country consists of four races, meaning there are 32 in total, creating a quite substantial game – so substantial in fact that Gremlin included a handy password system. While it's not always obvious that you're racing in the country in question, the tracks themselves are excellent, with plenty of challenging twists and turns. Four different cars are available, all of which play differently to each other, while the need to pit on some of the bigger tracks adds an exciting risk vs reward element, particularly when playing against another player. *Top Gear* was succeeded by two sequels, both released for SNES, but the original game will always remain our favourite. *



mph
00'12"23
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mph
00'12"23
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134 mph
01'01"46
N×2
AUTO:5
4TH
149 mph
01'01"46
N×3
GEAR:5
7TH
097 mph
00'10"28
N×2
AUTO:5
16TH




085 mph
00'10"28
N×3
GEAR:4
18TH




055 mph
03'02"28
FUEL LOW
N×0
AUTO:4
8TH




000 mph
03'02"28
STOP
N×3
GEAR:5
10TH

Mike Posehn might describe himself as "not much of a game player", but he was responsible for one of the defining games of the early Nineties. Get to the chopper and join pilot Nick Thorpe for a look back at EA's amazing game…

# DESERT




**In today's gaming market, the open world 'sandbox' style of game is widespread – but in the early Nineties, if you wanted a more flexible approach to the shoot-'em-up, you were faced with a more literal sandbox because *Desert Strike* had few alternatives. "In early 1990 Trip** Hawkins asked me if I would like to create a new game," designer Mike Posehn recalls. It was an unusual request, in some ways – Mike's previous projects for Electronic Arts hadn't been games, but at the time he happened to be working on a flight simulator. "Trip had always liked *Choplifter* because of the 'cool feeling' it produced when you rescued people with a helicopter. EA gave me one of its 'artist work stations' which was a Sega prototype box board with a programmable game cartridge with an Apple Macintosh interface."

Choosing Mike was even more of a surprise, given his feelings on videogames at the time. "I was not much of a game-player because I didn't like the then-current flat 2D scroller style of game design," he explains. His desire to break the conventions he disliked ended up influencing many of the design choices in *Desert Strike*. "I had always liked the isometric viewpoint because it gave the feel of 3D without the heavy lifting of supporting true 3D. I coded up a demo of a simple chopper that you could fly over little guy to do a rescue. If you flew slowly close to him, an automatic control would take over to lower the 'winch cable' and pick him up. It was really cool and it produced the satisfying 'rescue' feeling that Trip wanted."

As a self-confessed non-gamer, Mike needed some assistance in adding structure to the demo, but the publisher helped out on this front. "EA paired me up with John Manley and we came up with a game script called '*Beirut Breakout*.' I did the technical design, but John was the true gamer who knew how to create compelling story that would be fun to play," he recalls. It didn't take long to find that story, either. "The Lebanese civil war was in the news at the time, so doing flying rescues in the desert seemed like a natural setting that wouldn't require a lot of explanation." The story of the rise of the mad general Kilbaba, ▶

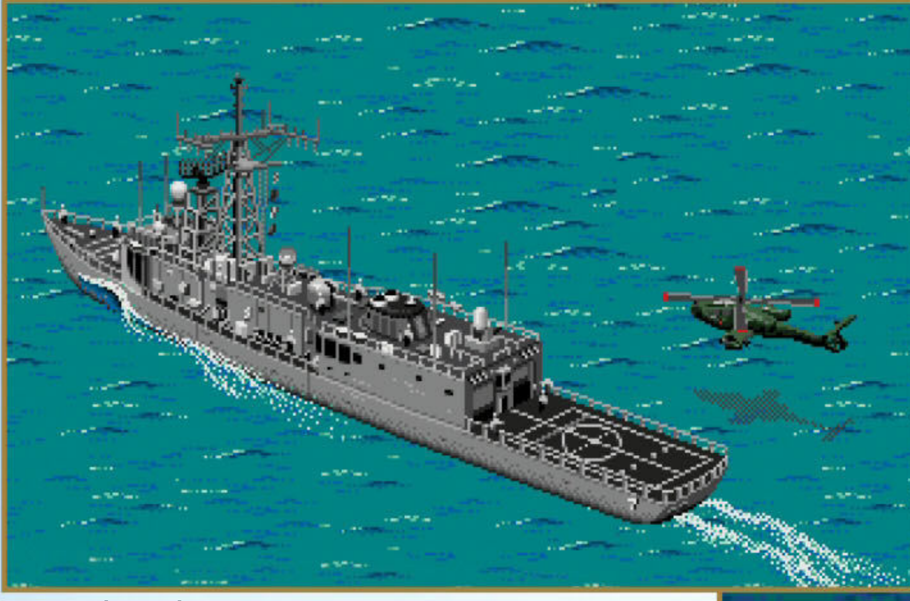
# STRIKE
## RETURN TO THE GULF




» [Mega Drive] Copilots had different stats, but the best one had to be rescued from the battlefield.

» [Mega Drive] Key targets, like this missile silo, are often heavily defended – approach with caution.

» [Mega Drive] Buildings could often hide pick-ups – but just as often an enemy would be waiting.



» [Mega Drive] Every campaign begins on a frigate, and you'll have to make it back there alive.



» [Mega Drive] Kilbaba attempts to destroy his own oil fields in the chaos of the final campaign.



who has seized control of an unidentified Gulf country and set to work on building nuclear bombs, certainly doesn't seem that far-fetched even now.

The result of these early design choices is that *Desert Strike* was quite different to other Mega Drive shooting games, which were predominantly arcade-inspired. Your Apache helicopter was a weighty piece of hardware, noticeably affected by its own momentum, and you start out with powerful weaponry but must constantly replenish your ammunition. However, the most important thing about *Desert Strike* was the open nature of its campaigns. This too was inspired by Mike's dissatisfaction with existing games. "Basically, I hated the rigid multi-level boss system that was so prevalent. I wanted the player to be unconstrained rather than locked in to a linear script," Mike recalls.

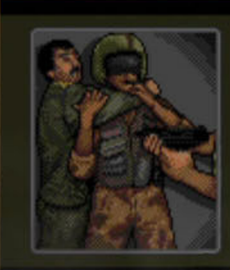
> **"I wanted the player to be unconstrained rather than locked in to a linear script"**
> Mike Posehn

"I thought you should be able to move freely about the world and just blow things up if that's what you wanted. But, we had to have some way to progress through levels; so John and I came up with the mini-missions and the snafu system."

"Each level had a main objective that you accomplished by completing a series of mini-missions," Mike continues. "Basically, it was virtually impossible to complete the main mission if you didn't complete the mini-missions first. When a mini-mission was completed, the enemy AI became a little less effective." These objectives were ordered in a way that made sense from a tactical perspective, so there was a key incentive to follow them. "For example, an enemy missile system's range and accuracy would decrease after you shot up the nearby radar installation," Mike offers. "With the radar intact, you would never be able to get through."

In fact, *Desert Strike* as a whole offers an excellent sense of progression. Each of the

» [Mega Drive] Occasionally you'll gain new information from captives or allies through brief cutscenes.

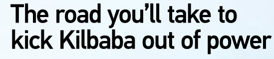


» [Mega Drive] Every rescued person restored 100 points of armour, making MIA comrades worth seeking.

campaigns takes place at a different time of day, and Kilbaba's desperation becomes palpable as the game continues – as well as encountering tougher defences, you'll go from pre-emptively striking airfields to countering the madman's attempts to flood the sea with oil and use nuclear weapons. It's an astonishing accomplishment considering the economy with which the levels had to be constructed: "The cartridge was advertised as '8 MEGS' – that meant eight megabits, only one megabyte! To save space all the art was made up of 8-bit square tiles. A 512x512 pixel region of the world was just 64x64 tiles. But instead of 4,096 unique tiles, it was just a catalogue of maybe 32 unique tiles. So that 512x512 pixel region could be drastically compressed into a simple look-up table. I think there were less than 80 bytes free in the final cartridge of *Desert Strike*."

Critical reception was rapturous upon the game's release in early 1992. In a 94% review for *Mean Machines*, the reviewer declared his love for the game's open-ended nature and described it as "one of the finest Mega Drive blasters yet seen". *Sega Pro* awarded the game 92% and described it as "essentially a full-scale war with all the sights,

# DEPOSING A DICTATOR


The road you'll take to kick Kilbaba out of power





## CAMPAIGN 1: AIR SUPERIORITY

■ Your road to getting rid of Kilbaba starts here, in the morning sun. To start off, you'll need to blow up a pair of radar dishes . Prioritise removing the powerful Rapier surface-to-air missile launchers over the less powerful AAAs. Once these are gone, you can move on to the power station and then the airfield. Watch out – reinforcements will arrive as you work! After this, capturing enemy commanders should be easy, and you'll find out the location of your lost agent. Blow up the building hiding him, take out some VDAs while your copilot rescues him and then get back to the frigate.

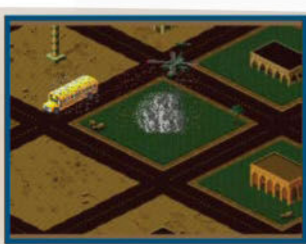





## CAMPAIGN 2: SCUD BUSTER

■ This afternoon strike begins much like the first campaign, but with jailbreaks between the radar and power station missions. Clear as many enemies as you can, you'll need room to move when the reinforcements arrive. Once these missions are complete, blowing up the chemical weapons factory will flush out scud commanders. Each of the six knows where one launcher is, and you need to blow up five – thankfully, each is near the next commander. Having caused all that chaos, you can then get to work on liberating prisoners of war at the north of the map.





## CAMPAIGN 3: EMBASSY CITY

■ This early evening mission is where things start getting very dangerous. Your first job is to rescue UN inspectors, who will tell you the location of biological weapon factories. Destroy these until you capture the chemist who tells you the location of secret missile silos that need a good bombing. You'll then do some work at sea, rescuing stranded pilots before confronting Kilbaba's heavily-guarded yacht – a much easier task if you blow up the power station. Lastly, you'll need to capture the enemy ambassador to free the US embassy officials – they'll escape by bus, and you need to escort them out.






## CAMPAIGN 4: NUCLEAR STORM

■ Your final campaign takes place at night, and Kilbaba's going for a scorched earth approach. Save the oil fields from attack, then stop him dumping oil into the sea. Once this has been accomplished, you'll need to blow open four bunkers and rescue prisoners. From here, it's all about stopping nuclear war. You need to find the garbage trucks containing nuclear parts and blow them up, while avoiding civilian trucks, then blow up the nuclear facility. Finally, flush Kilbaba out of his palace with explosive force, chase him to his plane and make sure her never gets the chance to drop a bomb.



» [Mega Drive] *Desert Strike* is a challenging game, so expect to see yourself shot down a lot.



» [Mega Drive] Taking out strategic targets, such as radars and power stations, hampered enemies.

sounds and gruesome trimmings crammed into an 8Mbit cart," while noting that some of the game's missions were "uncomfortably close to recent events in the Gulf".

Of course, making a game about a war in the Middle East is likely to be topical at any given moment, and that was the case for *Desert Strike*. While development had started during the declining months of the Lebanese Civil War, it had managed to stretch right through the Gulf War – indeed, a dedication to those who served in the conflict is found in the credits. This caused controversy in some quarters. "I was surprised to see a CNN report where they said, 'First the Gulf War and now a Gulf War videogame,'" remembers Mike. "Of course there was no such connection in our minds, but the game story was about a military dictator in a desert region. I suppose it was good publicity regardless and only helped game sales."

Mike's not wrong – the game sold massively well, becoming EA's biggest hit. The game was soon licensed for conversion to a variety of other formats, and spawned four sequels in *Jungle Strike*, *Urban Strike*, *Soviet Strike* and *Nuclear Strike*. Even though Mike no longer works on games today, it's a legacy he's fond of. "I'm continually surprised and pleased by the interest and I'm always happy to hear from fans who like the game," he tells us. "One of the best was from a fan in Brazil who loved the game so much as a teenager, he became a helicopter pilot in real life." That's an incredible situation, but *Desert Strike* was a game so distinctive that it invited obsession. Today, open world games are seemingly as constant as the armed conflicts that inspired *Desert Strike*, but it's arguable that they wouldn't be had it not been for the game's success – and that's an incredible gaming legacy for a designer who didn't really play many videogames. ✱

» [Mega Drive] Areas like Kilbaba's palace really stuck out amidst the sparse desert scenery.



**"A fan in Brazil loved the game so much as a teenager, he became a helicopter pilot in real life"**

Mike Posehn



# CONVERSION CAPERS

**EA's biggest hit of the early Nineties was too big to stay confined the to Mega Drive – here's how it fared on other battlefields…**

## AMIGA 1993

■ The Amiga version of *Desert Strike* received some excellent new sampled audio, with MIA soldiers shouting for help and much meatier effects in general. Graphical updates are present too, with new explosions and a revised front end. However, having to switch between weapons manually is definitely an annoyance.



## SNES 1993

■ Very little has been changed from the Mega Drive version – you'll notice a few audio differences but little else. However, as the graphics have been ported straight across and the SNES has a smaller horizontal display resolution, you lose about 20 per cent of your viewing distance, making the game slightly harder.





## LYNX 1993

■ You might not get a detailed ground texture on the Lynx, but Atari's handheld comes out on top with an otherwise excellent rendition of the game. Unlike the other portable versions of *Desert Strike*, all three weapons are on separate buttons, giving an experience closer to that of the original Mega Drive game.

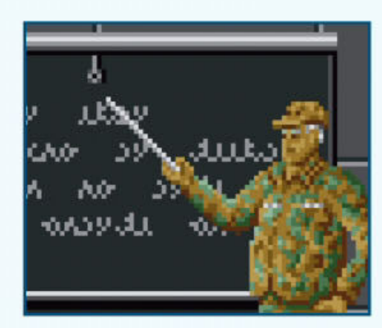


## GAME GEAR 1993

■ Tiertex handled the Game Gear conversion, which falls short of the standard set by its Master System cousin. Redrawn visuals for the small screen are marred by a low frame-rate, but the real problem is an awkward control scheme that maps the main gun and Hydras to the same button.

# Q&A: GERALD WEATHERUP

**The former Ocean programmer tells us how Desert Strike was miniaturised for the Game Boy**



**Had you played *Desert Strike* before your team got the job of working on the Game Boy version? If so, what did you think of it?**
No, I hadn't played it before we got the job to convert it. We were asked to play it and see what we thought. It was my type of game and I really enjoyed playing it, to be honest. The team was only small, for your reference – the artist was Dawn Drake and the sound and music was done by Jon Dunn.

**What access to the original *Desert Strike* code did you have while programming the conversion?**
I think we did have access to the code, but it wasn't really of much use at the time. Since it was all in assembly and specific to the platform it was difficult to translate that into a cut-down Z80. The approach as was normal at that time [was] to play the game, and rewrite it. Code reuse really wasn't an option with low level languages and different processors. We did have access to the graphics, though, which were re-rendered into four colours and shrunk as required.

**What were the main challenges of getting *Desert Strike* running on the Game Boy?**
There was a limited number of sprites available on the screen, 40 if I remember correctly, and they were 8x8 pixels in size. I had to write a specialist graphics application to grab the minimum number of sprites for the maximum size helicopter shape. And, there were only 256 background characters available for the ground graphics.

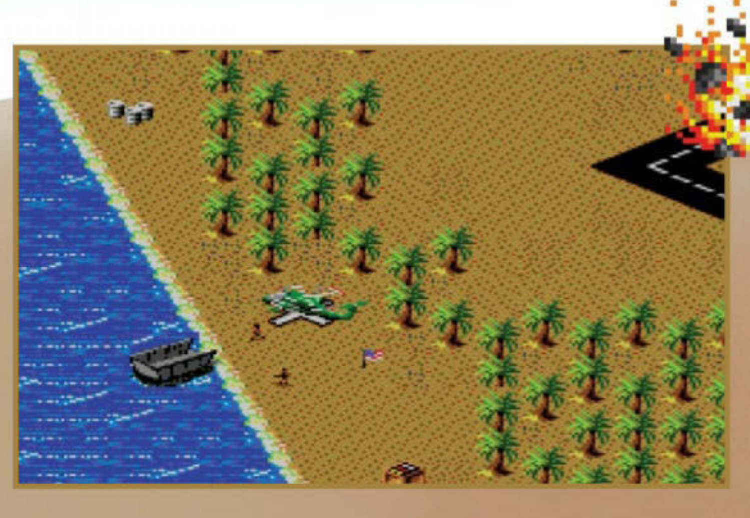
I deployed various methods to get extra sprites on the screen. It was possible to turn the list upside down every frame and use the persistence of the LCD to fake another 40 sprites. Also, you could convert the sprites into background graphics.

Since the cartridge space [on the Game Boy] was a premium, the size of the levels and the amount of graphics used was also a challenge. Various compression methods had to be employed: for example, for ground maps, decompressing graphics only when they where required. Buildings in one part of the map are not used in others, so as some buildings go off the screen their space is then freed up so new graphics can come in.

**How long did your team have to work on the game, was it a tight deadline?**
I think we had about six months end to end. For any product Christmas was the best selling period, and with manufacturing a few months before it was always a challenge.

**What aspects of the Game Boy version of *Desert Strike* were you most pleased with?**
The feel of the game. I spent lots of time ensuring that the feel of the game was as good as I could get – for me, in playing any game the playability was the number one requirement.

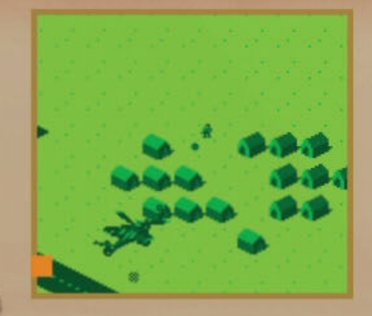
**Did anything particularly funny or unusual happen while you were working on the game?**
At one point I was sleeping under my desk due to time constraints on getting the project done!



### MASTER SYSTEM 1993
■ The Kremlin did a superb job of squeezing *Desert Strike* into the comparatively limited Master System, with the gameplay and map design of the original maintained on the 8-bit format, and a good two-button control scheme with the 1 and 2 buttons used together for Hellfires.

### PC 1994
■ Gremlin's PC version is an odd cross between the Amiga and Mega Drive versions. Some graphics have been redrawn again, for the worse, while sound is generally of a lower quality than the Amiga game. On the other hand, the added speech effects are welcome.

### GAME BOY 1994
■ The Game Boy version has the same slightly awkward control system as the Game Gear one, but it plays rather well otherwise and has more stable performance. Some excellent graphical work means that the loss of colour isn't as much of an issue as you might imagine.



### GAME BOY ADVANCE 2002
■ This is more or less a straight conversion of the Mega Drive game, but with an even smaller field of view than on the SNES. However, keeping Jink and Hellfire off the same button is a marked improvement over the original game. The retention of passwords where save data could have been implemented is baffling.



### AND THE REST...
■ The original Mega Drive version of *Desert Strike* is available on PSP, as part of the *EA Replay* compilation. While it plays just fine, the sound is a bit wobbly – a common problem with Mega Drive emulation. Additionally, the Amiga version is available via emulation on Blackberry platforms.

# Future Classic

*Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come*

## INFO

» **Featured System:** PlayStation 3
» **Year:** 2009
» **Publisher:** Sony
» **Developer:** Naughty Dog
» **Key People:** Amy Hennig (creative director), Bruce Straley (game director), Richard Lemarchand, Neil Druckmann (lead game designers)

## GO DEEPER

» **The collectible 'Strange Relic' in Chapter 5 will be familiar to Naughty Dog fans – it's a Precursor Orb from *Jak & Daxter*.**

» **The Cintimani Stone (this game's MacGuffin) isn't a typical precious stone – it's amber made of sap from the Tree Of Life.**



»[PS3] The melee system continues to improve between games, but it's perfectly functional here.

# 54. UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES

***As Nathan Drake's adventure draws to a close on PS4, Luke Albigés revisits the entry that turned Naughty Dog's wise-cracking hero into one of the biggest names in the business***

## THE BACKGROUND

After ten years of developing beloved cartoon-style games that starred orange furry creatures, Naughty Dog saw a new console generation as the perfect opportunity to show the world what it could *really* do. Enter *Uncharted*, a new IP released in PlayStation 3's first year on the market and one that wasn't actually as far from *Crash* and *Jax* as it may first have appeared, at least in terms of tone. While the industry trends of the time saw gritty shooters trying oh-so-hard to be edgy and cool, Naughty Dog instead took inspiration from classic adventure movies like *Indiana Jones* or *Romancing The Stone*, this playful approach helping *Uncharted* stand out from the crowd. It launched to critical and commercial success – Sony had a potential new hit franchise on its hands. In order for *Uncharted* to become just that, however, the team would need to go all-out with its sequel and it's fair to say that's exactly what happened. *Among Thieves* is regarded as one of the best sequels of all time, building on the foundations of the original while going crazy with the cinematic seasoning that the first game had used sparingly.

## THE GAME

From the very first moment, it's clear that *Among Thieves* is something special. Pulling no punches, Naughty Dog throws you straight into a climb-or-die situation as Nathan Drake wakes up soaked in blood in a train carriage that's hanging precariously over a cliff edge. It's an incredible set-piece and one that sets the tone and standard for the entire game, despite how heavily scripted the sequence is. That's one of the things the team absolutely nailed with *Uncharted 2*, actually – delivering action-heavy moments that kept the player in control and the sense of peril ever-present when in reality, many of these are explicitly designed to keep Drake just a ledge or two ahead of danger at all times. Even if or when you begin to see through the smoke and mirrors here, it doesn't matter – movie action scenes are no less impressive just because you know it's all actors, stuntmen and effects and it's certainly the same here. You're invested in the action playing out in front of you, in the characters, and that prevents any indication that this is a performance – rather than an actual event – from detracting from the experience.



»[PS3] This sequence blew us away when we first saw it, but it's even better to play.



»[PS3] Okay, *this* is how you start a story. There's no better opening sequence in modern gaming…



»[PS3] Vistas are often stunning, and do a great job of making the game world feel bigger than it actually is.

## Things of note

### NON-LINEAR NARRATIVE



The train set-piece that opens the game occurs in media res – it actually takes place halfway through the game. It's one hell of an opener, regardless.

### FLOWING MOVEMENT



*Uncharted 2* features over seven times the number of in-game cinematic animations as its forebear, thanks to performance capture.

### MULTIPLAYER?!



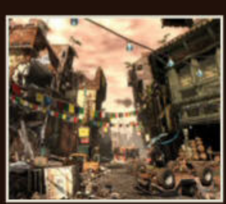
*Uncharted 2* introduced competitive multiplayer to the franchise for the first time, and it was good fun. Naughty Dog explored this concept in *The Last Of Us*.

### "OH CRAP!"



Although Nolan North has appeared in over 80 per cent of all videogames ever, he will be best-known as the voice of Drake. His performance as Drake has been excellent.

### OBEY YOUR REMASTER



The *Nathan Drake Collection* on PS4 saw Bluepoint Games give *Among Thieves* (and the other two games) a next-gen lick of paint.

**"It's worth noting just how much of a technical leap Uncharted 2 represented over the original"**

Characters are a keystone in this process, and it's the brilliantly-written dialogue and superb voice work that really helps the player connect with the stars. This is one creative muscle that Naughty Dog hadn't really been given the opportunity to flex prior to *Uncharted* – *Crash* hardly called for witty writing or star power, after all – and the team fell into it amazingly quickly. The original may have played it a little safer than the sequels, but it did enough to make us like and, to an extent, believe them, something this spectacular sequel managed to take even further. Having established Drake and Sully, *Uncharted 2* was free to introduce a new cast of rogues for our heroes to bounce banter off, in turn giving us a different perspective on the returning characters through how they interact with the newcomers.

It's also worth noting just how much of a technical leap *Uncharted 2* represented over the original. *Drake's Fortune* was pretty impressive for its time but on release *Among Thieves* was peerless on console – the team quickly got a handle on the PS3 architecture and worked the machine harder than any other studio, culminating in the outstanding *The Last Of Us*. But this was the magic moment when PS3's power advantage over the more established Xbox 360 was first made truly apparent, Sony's first real essential exclusive for the platform, offering a level of fidelity and cinematic grandeur that its rivals simply couldn't compete with. Animation was, as ever for the studio, superb, visuals incredible and camera work and framing, two factors key to nailing the Hollywood feel of the game, both on-point.

This was a studio in its prime, delivering something that blew us away on both technical and creative levels and while the action genre moves so quickly that *Uncharted 2* is certainly starting to show its age today, its significance is something that nobody, not even Father Time himself, can ever take away from Naughty Dog.



»[PS3] Gunplay improved significantly over *Drake's Fortune*, and generally feels much tighter.

### WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Even though the shiny new *Uncharted 4* on PS4 arguably does everything *Among Thieves* did and does it all better, *Uncharted 2*'s 'classic' status is as much a reflection on the game as a turning point for Sony and a studio coming into its own as it is on the game itself. It still holds up today – particularly if you opt for the remastered version that hit PS4 last year – and some of its set-pieces are still to be bettered the best part of a decade on. If *Uncharted 4* does indeed turn out to be Drake's final voyage, this will remain the most important game in the entire series. It's the one that turned a decent action-adventure into a genre-defining monster and when even genre pioneer *Tomb Raider* is cribbing from *Uncharted* (as seen unmistakably in the 2013 reboot), you have to concede that it was the second game that truly introduced Drake as the hero PlayStation formats truly deserved. ✱



»[PS3] Every great game has a train level. That's a stone cold fact right there…



CLASSIC MOMENTS

# Mario Kart 64

» **PLATFORM:** N64 » **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO EAD » **RELEASED:** 1996

**Taking *Mario Kart* into 3D didn't seem like too big of a deal in *Mario Kart 64*'s earlier stages, such as Luigi's Raceway.** Sure, you'd see the odd dip or incline but nothing which seemed a million miles away from the flat circuits of the SNES game. Not so with Toad's Turnpike – this was a completely different proposition to anything seen in *Super Mario Kart*. Not only were there cars and towering lorries to be seen looming above your racer, they were actually constant hazards on the road. One errant manoeuvre was all it took to send you into the path of a much larger vehicle, which would squash your poor driver flat.

In multiplayer – the heart and soul of the *Mario Kart* experience, to be sure – Toad's Turnpike was a track that favoured pure driving skills over proficiency with weapons. Even the most practiced of Green Shell masters would struggle to place a good shot within the track's dense traffic, while the best racers could weave through the jam with no problem. *

## BIO

It's no surprise that the N64 saw a sequel to *Super Mario Kart* – the racer wasn't just a hit spin-off from one of gaming's most famous characters, but one of the finest multiplayer games of its generation. *Mario Kart 64* proved to be an ideal showcase for the N64's 3D rendering prowess and an instant justification for its inclusion of four controller ports as standard. Reception from the press and public alike was rapturous, and the game is still considered one of the series' finest moments, placing 72nd in our readers' list of the top 150 games of all time for issue 150.

# MORE CLASSIC MARIO KART 64 MOMENTS




## Tunnel Of Love

The shortcut through the cliff in Koopa Beach is obvious – there's a red and yellow ramp pointing right at it. That doesn't mean it's easy to get into it, though, and it's always satisfying when you manage to blast into the tunnel and steal first place. Your friends will hate you, mind – well, at least they weren't hit by a blue shell. Speaking of which…




## Blue Monday

*Mario Kart 64* introduced a new number one weapon on the block – the blue shell, officially the Spiny Shell, which hunted down the racer in first place while taking out everyone it hit on the way. This was the weapon that started millions of multiplayer arguments, but it was a revelation for players that often found themselves falling behind the pack.




## A Familiar Landmark

If you turn right after the long jump in Royal Raceway instead of following the track, you'll find an interesting Easter Egg related to the excellent *Super Mario 64*. Peach's Castle is not only present, but remarkably accurate with its moat, the correct trees and more. Sadly, urban legends of being able to get inside the castle turned out to be untrue.




## I'll Strike You Twice

You can admit it to us – you used the Lightning when your mates were going over the jump in Wario Stadium. There's no shame, we're all friends here. Okay, maybe a bit of shame – it's one of the most antisocial tactics possible in the game, as it caused victims to lose about half a lap of progress and fall massively behind.

# Minority Report

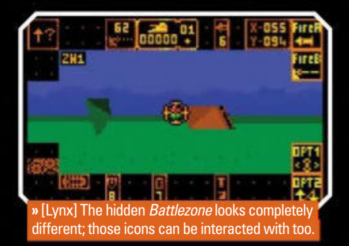
INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

## ATARI LYNX

**The Atari Lynx is known for its thriving homebrew scene and its many great arcade ports, but they're not the only games available on the system. Darran Jones investigates some of the system's more quirkier games and instantly regrets selling his collection**

# BATTLEZONE 2000

■ DEVELOPER: HANDMADE SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1995



» [Lynx] The hidden *Battlezone* looks completely different; those icons can be interacted with too.



» [Lynx] There are 2000 Zones to battle through in the game, meaning you'll be playing for a while.

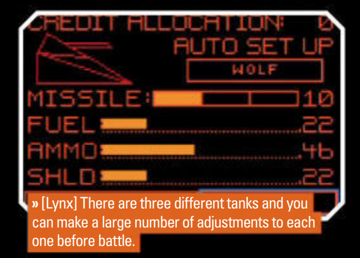
■ By 1995 the Atari Lynx was something of a footnote. Many had left the system behind due to the well running dry and few games were getting released. And yet, in the same year that the PlayStation and Saturn began to make their presence felt, Atari released two of the Lynx's most impressive games; one was *Super Asteroid & Missile Command*, the other was *Battlezone 2000*. Both games were part of a planned Lynx relaunch, but Atari diverted all its attention to its Jaguar console instead, and its limited funds meant that its impressive portable never received a second stab at success.

Initial appearances suggested that *Battlezone 2000* was a simple adaptation of the once popular arcade game, but playing it revealed this wasn't the case at all. Although *Battlezone 2000* looked similar to the arcade original, it was structured completely different, with a variety of different missions and several tanks to choose from. The tanks themselves could be customised and it was possible to tweak their shield, ammo and fuel, safe in the knowledge that suitable power-ups could be picked up on the field during play. Some levels required you to destroy a set number of tanks, while others requested that the stage be completed in a specific amount of time or that a certain point threshold was met. It kept the game interesting, and, coupled with the slick controls, meant that the pace of *Battlezone 2000* was always hectic and exciting, more so if you could link up with three other players via the ComLynx.

As good as *Battlezone 2000* was, this aspect of the game tells






» [Lynx] There are three different tanks and you can make a large number of adjustments to each one before battle.

only half the story. Amazingly, the developers locked an enhanced version of *Battlezone 2000* inside the game, with no clear indication in the instructions on how to reach it. It's unclear why it was kept hidden (some suggested that Atari felt it was too difficult and complicated for players to grasp) but it's an astonishingly bone-headed move as it's truly excellent.

For starters it looks fantastic as it features filled polygons and full colour graphics. It obviously takes a hit speed wise compared to the wireframe version of the game, but it still moves at an impressive rate and easily puts many similar games on home systems to shame.

It builds on the mission structure of the standard Lynx game, but adds things like independent movement (activated by pressing Option 1) a huge map with different environments and objectives to complete and a ridiculous amount of customisation that admittedly feels a little daunting the first time you encounter it. Persevere however and you'll discover that this second iteration of *Battlezone* has a lot to offer. Yes it's a little fiddly due to having to access out of the way icons during play, but it's incredibly satisfying all the same. The game is absolutely huge in size too, as that gigantic map essentially consists of 2000 different levels to complete, meaning Handmade Software's game will take an absolute age to master. *Battlezone 2000* is a game that every Lynx owner needs in their collection, just be aware that its late launch means those copies that do crop up are typically pricey.

## IN DEPTH

### LEVEL-UP
■ Every wave in *Battlezone 2000* is different and ensures that the game feels fresh. Shoot first and ask questions later and you'll be fine.

### TANK TROUBLE
■ There are a variety of different tanks in the game and they're all tough to deal with. You'll need to react quickly if you want to defeat all of them.

### WARNING, INCOMING OBJECTS!
■ As with the original game there are objects that can be used to hide behind.

### CLASSIC TOUCHES
■ As well as looking similar to the original, *Battlezone 2000* also features the volcano. It's a neat nod to the coin-op classic.

## IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



### SPECTRE
SUPER NINTENDO

■ It's not the terrible *James Bond* film, but a vector-based combat game that's very similar to *Battlezone*. The player must roam around a large playfield on the hunt for a number of flags while avoiding other tanks. It started off life on the Apple Mac, with the SNES version being an enhanced update.



### BATTLEZONE
XBOX 360

■ Created by Stainless Games in 2008, *Battlezone* includes the original arcade classic (complete with achievements and leaderboards) but also adds a new 'Evolved' mode. While similar to the original, it adds additional game components, including Team Deathmatch and Capture The Flag options.



### WORLD OF TANKS
PC

■ This free-to-play online battler has been a phenomenal success, allowing players to compete against others in a variety of frantic battles. There are six different types of battles to participate in, along with camouflage mechanics and lots of customisation. It also boasts a surprisingly fair freemium model too.

# Minority Report

# BATTLEWHEELS

■ DEVELOPER: BEYOND GAMES ■ YEAR: 1993

■ It's a pity Kris N. Johnson only made a couple of games for Atari's Lynx, because he really coaxed the best out of it. For those that have never played it, *BattleWheels* is a fast-paced action game that plays to the Lynx's strengths and reveals just how capable Atari's console was when it was in the right hands. Graphically it's rather astonishing with some truly impressive scaling results that still manage to wow today. Vehicles tear around the screen at a decent frame-rate while downed enemies get out of their wrecked cars and rush towards you. Explosions fill the screen constantly, while the first-person view throws you right into the action, allowing you to soak up the carnage that's happening in front of you.

The gameplay of *BattleWheels* can't match the spectacle of its aesthetics but it remains enjoyable. Essentially it's an arena-based multiplayer game and is at its best played against other Lynx owners. While the game caters for up to six players, it's likely that most Lynx owners will have only experienced it as a single-player game where you're thrown into a large arena and must take out the other players as quickly as possible. Your vehicle is armed with a suitable array of weaponry, and buildings provide useful cover against opponents. It creates a nice dynamic too, allowing you to expose yourself briefly to down enemies, before scurrying back to cover again.

While *BattleWheels* is aimed at multiplayer, the AI is challenging enough to ensure that playing on your own doesn't feel like a chore. If you can find some extra players though, you'll discover *BattleWheels* to be one of the best multiplayer games on the system.



» [Lynx] It's possible to check out the action from the side and rear windows.

» [Lynx]There are an array of options, allowing you to change the number of enemies and types of vehicles used.

» [Lynx] You can even enter the arena of *BattleWheels* on foot, but it's not really advised…

» [Lynx] The scaling throughout is very impressive and highlights the power of Atari's handheld.

## MORE GAMES TO PLAY




### » DIRTY LARRY: RENEGADE COP

■ DEVELOPER: KNIGHT TECHNOLOGIES
■ YEAR: 1992

■ This may be just another scrolling beat-'em-up but it's one that tries to break the mould. Unlike many of its peers, *Dirty Larry* immediately arms you with a gun, giving you an advantage against the city's scumbags. It also features narration from Larry, which captures the gumshoe vibe that Knight Technologies has been inspired by. It lacks variety, but it is fun while it lasts.



### » GORDO 106

■ DEVELOPER: TENTH PLANET
■ YEAR: 1992

■ This is one of the Lynx's most interesting platformers and revolves around helping test subject Gordo 106 escape from a mad scientist's lab. The gameplay is a little tricky due to the numerous bottomless pits and finicky controls, but once you get the hang of it you'll be swinging from light to light and running around the lab with ease. *Gordo 106* isn't groundbreaking, but it plays well and features impressively large sprites.




### » ISHIDO: THE WAY OF THE STONES

■ DEVELOPER: SOFTWARE RESOURCES INTERNATIONAL ■ YEAR: 1991

■ This puzzle game is easy to grasp, but difficult to master. The idea is to place 72 stones on a game board consisting of 96 squares. Each pair of stones has a colour and a symbol and there are six colours and symbols in each set, making 72 stones in total. It sounds straightforward, but the need to ensure that each placed stone matches those adjacent to it will soon cause major headaches.




### » MALIBU BIKINI VOLLEYBALL

■ DEVELOPER: HANDMADE SOFTWARE
■ YEAR: 1993

■ This is another solid effort from Handmade Software. Graphically it's neat with strong animation and crisp visuals. Options-wise *Volleyball* is substantial; you can adjust the play time, the wind speed and the points needed to win and it caters for up to four players via the ComLynx. It takes time to get used to spiking the ball and your partner's AI is can be erratic, but it still manages to deliver.

# CHECKERED FLAG

■ DEVELOPER: ATARI CORPORATION ■ YEAR: 1991

■ If we have one complaint about *Checkered Flag* it is that it's a little unforgiving at times. The AI is quite ferocious, even on the earlier stages, meaning you have to constantly battle for position as you tear around the well-designed tracks. Of course, some will enjoy this, as games need to be challenging, but we'll admit that others might not appreciate the rather high entry level.

Get past this, however, and you'll discover a lot to enjoy about this spiritual successor to *Pole Position*. Graphically it's very good with great animation and super slick scrolling. It's not quite as fast as we'd like, but it remains solid and there's plenty of trackside detail. It even features a neat follow camera, with the player able to switch between other racers with a press of Option 1 if they get knocked out of a race.

There's a surprising amount of customisation to be found in *Checkered Flag* from the number of drones you can race against to the amount of laps and whether you race as a male or female driver. You can participate in practice runs, take part in single heats or even compete in a lengthy tournament. The range of options on display is highly impressive ensuring plenty of longevity, even outside of the six-player multiplayer mode.

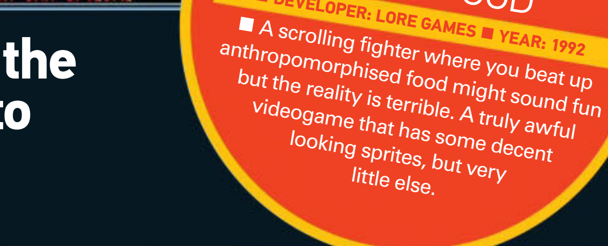



» [Lynx] Spinning out my look rather cool but it costs you precious time.

» [Lynx] Female characters get smooched by a male model upon winning.

» [Lynx] *Checkered Flag* offers all sorts of different options to tweak.

> **"The AI is quite ferocious, even on the earlier stages, meaning you have to constantly battle for position"**



## RETRO STINKER
### » KUNG FOOD

■ DEVELOPER: LORE GAMES ■ YEAR: 1992

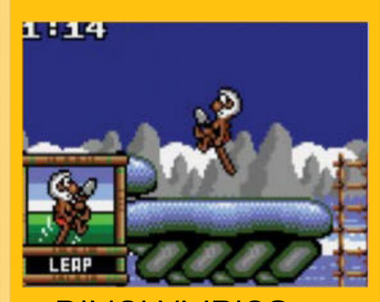
■ A scrolling fighter where you beat up anthropomorphised food might sound fun but the reality is terrible. A truly awful videogame that has some decent looking sprites, but very little else.



## » DRACULA THE UNDEAD

■ DEVELOPER: HANDMADE SOFTWARE
■ YEAR: 1992

■ As far as we're aware this is the only videogame representation of the late Christopher Lee as Dracula. The sepia tones of *Dracula* suit it well, making Handmade Software's game look like a living photograph. The game is entertaining too with the player taking on the role of Jonathan Harker as he escapes Dracula's castle. *Dracula*'s only shortfall is that it only takes a few hours to complete.




## » DINOLYMPICS

■ DEVELOPER: IMAGITEC DESIGN
■ YEAR: 1992

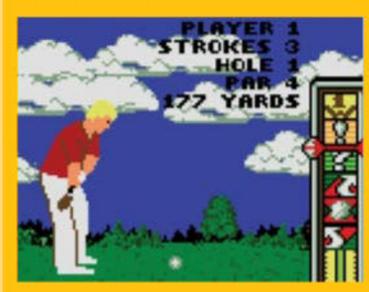
■ It's easy to dismiss *Dinolympics* as a *Lemmings* rip-off, but it's definitely its own game. Each level gives you a specific task, from collecting a spear to protecting an idol, and it must be achieved with a set number of cavemen - all of which have different abilities. Levels start off simple, but you'll find yourself utilising various skills as the stages get trickier. Oh, and if it sounds like *The Humans*, it's because it was renamed for the Lynx.



## » SHANGHAI

■ DEVELOPER: MEDIAGENIC
■ YEAR: 1990

■ Here we have an incredibly simplistic game, but it's an exceptionally satisfying one too. There are a number of different board layouts to choose from, but the aim is always the same – clear every tile by matching them two at a time. It sounds simple, but tiles can only be removed from the structure's edges and *Shanghai*'s randomised nature means you can face some tricky combinations as play progresses.




## » AWESOME GOLF

■ DEVELOPER: HANDMADE SOFTWARE
■ YEAR: 1991

■ It's not quite as awesome as its title suggests, but Handmade's golf game is an essential addition to any Lynx library. There are three courses to choose from, set in America, Japan and England, it features an easy-to-use interface, there's a large array of customisable options and an excellent multiplayer mode. The swing meter is a little daunting at first, but it soon clicks, leaving you with an enjoyable rendition of the popular sport.







# THE HISTORY OF DEAD OR ALIVE

*The popular perception of Tecmo's long-running fighter is that it's just about sex appeal, but never judge a book by its cover and Dead Or Alive is so much more than that. Nick Thorpe talks to Yohei Shimbori about the fighting franchise you shouldn't write off…*










» [Arcade] Tina's use of powerful professional wrestling moves was unusual amongst female fighting game characters.

» [Arcade] Ending a match by knocking the opponent into the Danger Zone would blow them sky high!

» [Arcade] Kasumi quickly became known as the face of the *Dead Or Alive* series.



## DEAD OR ALIVE 101

■ The *Dead Or Alive* series comprises one-on-one fighting games, with a plot centred on the machinations of the shady DOATEC corporation. The series places an emphasis on accessibility and spectacle over technical play and tournament balance, and is best known for its environmental attacks and, shall we say, 'prominent' female cast members.

**If you want your game to grab the headlines, there are a couple of things that you can include to greatly increase the odds of that happening – gratuitous violence and sex appeal. It's a tried-and-tested approach, which can work out spectacularly well** commercially. If you have any doubt, just consider the likes of *Barbarian*, which featured decapitations and Page Three model Maria Whittaker on the cover. However, it can also be a risky strategy, as evidenced by the controversial fighter *Thrill Kill*, which was cancelled after EA acquired the rights to the game. It's like betting everything on a single hand of poker, and while *Dead Or Alive* certainly didn't go as far as either of those games, the stakes were very real.

It's fair to say that Tecmo was struggling in the mid-Nineties. The likes of *Bomb Jack*, *Star Force* and *Tecmo Bowl* had sustained the company throughout the Eighties, but the company hadn't had any major hits for some time and was not doing well financially. In fact, it was very possible that Tecmo would not have survived much longer. The company responded to this threat by putting together a brand new team by the name of Team Ninja, helmed by Tomonobu Itagaki, and tasking it with the production of a strong competitor to the hottest arcade game of the day – and in Japanese arcades, *Virtua Fighter 2* was the game to beat.

Tecmo licensed Sega's Model 2 board – the same one which ran *Virtua Fighter 2* – and produced a fighting game with very similar mechanics, including a three-button system, ring-out victories and a lack of projectile attacks. There were some key differences, though. Firstly, the fighting arenas were rather larger than those of other 3D fighting games. However, much of the expanded area was reserved for the Danger Zone, an area in which being knocked to the floor resulted in an explosion that dealt further damage to the downed fighter. The other major difference was that instead of a simple guard button, Team Ninja's fighting game sported a hold button, which could be used to parry enemy attacks and even perform simple counter moves. The game was named *Dead Or Alive*, serving the dual purpose of being catchy and representing the level of risk that Tecmo was taking with it.

"In its early days, *Dead Or Alive* was far behind competitors such as *Virtua Fighter* and *Tekken* as a 3D fighter as they were there in the market already," explains long-time Team Ninja staff member Yohei Shimbori. "We were confident about our game, but there was lack of awareness and no brand for it yet. Only a handful of users knew about *Dead Or Alive* and we needed to get more people to try it or at least see the gameplay." It's a valid concern – any reader should be able to name a brilliant game that financially failed due to a lack of exposure. However, the developers had a plan to ensure that this wouldn't be an issue.

"In order to survive in the arcade market we needed something to differentiate *DOA* from other titles. This was the main reason why we focused on Kasumi who is a cute and sexy female fighter, not a muscular male grappler or male ninja," explains Shimbori. Indeed, three of the eight playable fighters in *Dead Or Alive* were women, with Kasumi joined by the wrestler Tina Armstrong and Tai Chi practitioner Leifang. Of course, the character designs weren't the only reason that people gravitated to the women of *Dead Or Alive* – infamously, their chests would wobble during ▶

## DID YOU KNOW?

*The five winners of the Dead Or Alive tournaments are Kasumi, Hayabusa, Ayane, Zack and Jann Lee, although Zack was gifted his title by Helena.*

fights. Shimbori is astonishingly frank on the subject. "We decided to implement the breast physics system to get people's attention; this approach succeeded," he says. "I can say that if we didn't have that original approach at the time, *Dead Or Alive 5* or even *Dead Or Alive 2* wouldn't exist in the world."

**No matter how heavily you credit bouncing breasts for its success, *Dead Or Alive* did well in arcades upon its release in late 1996 and soon found its way to the home console market. The Saturn version** of *Dead Or Alive* was released in 1997 and was more or less a straight conversion of the arcade game, but with the addition of new costumes, as well as the chance to fight as the final boss Raidou. It's regarded as one of the best 3D games on the system, as it runs in the system's high resolution mode at 60 frames per second.

By contrast, the 1998 PlayStation version made some big changes. The backgrounds were changed from the originals, and ring-out victories were rendered impossible by infinitely scrolling stages. However, the PlayStation game adopted new elements – as well as a new HUD that would provide the basis for *Dead Or Alive 2*, the game included two brand new characters. Bass Armstrong, Tina's father and a fellow wrestler, was included as the ninth member of the cast. Ayane, Kasumi's half-sister, surpassed Raidou as the game's last unlockable character. These enhancements saw the PlayStation game ported back to Japanese arcades as *Dead Or Alive++*, which improved the fighting further with additional speed and fluidity.

The original *Dead Or Alive* saved Tecmo and established the series, but the series' identity would be fully formed with the release of *Dead Or Alive 2* in late 1999. The sequel ran on Sega's Dreamcast-

» [Dreamcast] Kasumi demonstrates the series counter-heavy action by catching her nemesis Ayane's punch.




» [Dreamcast] *Dead Or Alive 2* was unquestionably one of the most graphically impressive games of its era.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Early builds of *Dead Or Alive* featured a Muay Thai fighter by the name of Kelly, who was later removed and rebuilt from the ground up as Zack.

# FIGHTERS FOR LIFE

Discover where all of your favourite Dead Or Alive fighters originated







### CANADA

**RIG**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Taekwondo
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 5*

### UNITED KINGDOM

**CHRISTIE**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** She Quan
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 3*

**ELIOT**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Xing Yi Quan
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 4*

### FRANCE

**HELENA DOUGLAS**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Pi Gua Quan
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 2*

### SPAIN

**MILA**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Mixed Martial Arts
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 5*

### USA

**TINA ARMSTRONG**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Professional Wrestling
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive*

**ZACK**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Self-taught Muay Thai
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive*

**BASS ARMSTRONG**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Professional Wrestling
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive* (PlayStation)

**LA MARIPOSA (LISA)**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Lucha Libre
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 4*

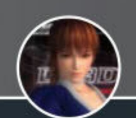
**SARAH BRYANT**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Mixed Martial Arts
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 5*
**ORIGINALLY FROM:** *Virtua Fighter*

**JACKY BRYANT**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Jeet Kune Do
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 5 Ultimate*
**ORIGINALLY FROM:** *Virtua Fighter*

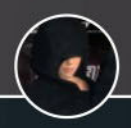
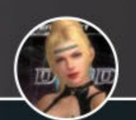
### ITALY

**LEON**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Sambo/Close Quarters Combat
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 2*

» Yohei Shimbori has been involved with *Dead Or Alive* for over a decade and been critical to the series' success in recent years.





## UNKNOWN

**KASUMI ALPHA**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Mugen Tenshin Ninjutsu (Tenjinmon Style)
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 2*

**TENGU**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Tengu-Do
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 2*

**ALPHA-152**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Modified Mugen Tenshin Ninjutsu (Tenjinmon Style)
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 4*

**SPARTAN-458**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Close Quarters Combat
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 4*

**NYOTENGU**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Tengu-Do
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 5 Ultimate Arcade*

**PHASE 4**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Modified Mugen Tenshin Ninjutsu (Tenjinmon Style)
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 5 Ultimate Arcade*

**RACHEL**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Counter Fiend Combat
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 5 Ultimate*








## SWEDEN

**MARIE ROSE**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Systema
**DEBUT:** Dead Or Alive 5 Ultimate Arcade



## RUSSIA

**BAYMAN**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Samba
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive*













HITOMI · HELENA DOUGLAS · LEON · MILA · KASUMI · EIN/HAYATE · KOKORO · MOMIJI · NAOTORA II · KOKORO · SHIDEN · PAI CHAN




## CHINA

**JANN LEE**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Jeet Kune Do
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive*

**LEIFANG**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Tai Chi
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive*

**GEN FU**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Xinyi Liuhe Quan
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive*

**BRAD WONG**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Zui Quan
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 3*

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Japanese release of *DOA Ultimate* was accompanied by a translucent blue Xbox, packaged with accessories including a five-foot Kasumi body pillow.

## GERMANY

**HITOMI**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Karate
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 3*

## HONG KONG

**PAI CHAN**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Mi Zong Yi
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 5*
**ORIGINALLY FROM:** *Virtua Fighter*

## JAPAN

**RAIDOU**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Modified Mugen Tenshin Ninjutsu (Tenjinmon Style)
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive*

**RYU HAYABUSA**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Hayabusa Ninjutsu
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive*

**KASUMI**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Mugen Tenshin Ninjutsu (Tenjinmon Style)
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive*

**AYANE**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Mugen Tenshin Ninjutsu (Hajinmon Style)
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive* (PlayStation)

**EIN/HAYATE**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Karate/ Mugen Tenshin Ninjutsu (Tenjinmon Style)
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 2*

**OMEGA/GENRA**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Modified Mugen Tenshin Ninjutsu (Hajinmon Style)
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 3*

**KOKORO**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Ba Ji Quan
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 4*

**AKIRA YUKI**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Ba Ji Quan
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 5*
**ORIGINALLY FROM:** *Virtua Fighter*

**MOMIJI**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Hayabusa Aikijutsu
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 5 Ultimate*

**NAOTORA II**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Li-Style Leg Strikes
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 5 Last Round*
**ORIGINALLY FROM:** *Samurai Warriors*

**HONOKA**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Honoka Fu
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive 5 Last Round*

**SHIDEN**
**FIGHTING STYLE:** Mugen Tenshin Ninjutsu (Tenjinmon Style)
**DEBUT:** *Dead Or Alive Dimensions*

> "In its early days, Dead Or Alive was far behind competitors such as Virtua Fighter
>
> Yohei Shimbori

based NAOMI arcade board and brought about many of the expected improvements over the original – more characters, new moves and a visual upgrade that was nothing short of stunning. *Dead Or Alive 2* retained the hold button, but introduced many more damaging counterattacks in place of the parries of the original. However, bigger features would define the game.

Firstly, the square rings were gone. In their place, *Dead Or Alive 2* featured interactive arenas with sloped surfaces and irregular dimensions. "The interactive fighting arenas are very clear and interesting differences between *DOA* and the other fighting games," says Shimbori. "I think the other fighting games are always focusing more on advanced players and tournaments. We also do that, however we pursue more intuitive entertainment as a game, a more casual fun factor, so that everyone who is not familiar with fighting games can pick it up and play. Danger Zones are an example of such a factor." Instead of a uniform explosive floor, Danger Zones now took the form of walls with explosives or electrification. What's more, there were now ledges to fall from and objects to be smashed through. There was no ring-out victory in *Dead Or Alive 2* – knocking your opponent from the current floor would result in your fighter leaping after them to finish the fight. "If the stage has such gimmicks, positioning your character in the stage becomes more important," Shimbori notes. Quite apart from that, he's of the opinion that simply being flashy is valid in itself – "explosions with exotic effects make fighting games more interesting," he says.

While *Dead Or Alive++* had included a tag team battle mode, it was in truth just a way to switch characters between rounds. For *Dead Or Alive 2*, Team Ninja allowed players to swap characters mid-match, and included special moves for characters to perform. This was a huge selling point at the time – especially when you consider that one of its direct competitors was Namco's *Tekken Tag Tournament*, in which the inclusion of tag-team fighting was considered major enough to warrant a brand new release.

> **"Balancing characters in Tag Mode is always a headache"**
> *Yohei Shimbori*

**D*ead Or Alive 2*'s tag team mode was so popular with players that it has been present in the series ever since, despite the development challenges it poses. "[The] tag mode has always been a bane for me," says Shimbori.** "To be honest, if we didn't have a tag mode, the development would be easier. But we've traditionally tried to live up to our fans expectations and wishes. I think it's insanely difficult to implement single match and tag match in one game, but we've been doing it for our fans." It's fascinating to find out that this is the case – tag mode is certainly something that sets *Dead Or Alive* apart from the competition, so we're interested to know exactly what makes it so difficult to pull off.

» [Xbox] Ein regained his identity as Hayate in *DOA3*, and remembered his ninja moves with it.

» [Xbox] Hitomi looks sweet, but she takes over from Ein as the series' resident karate master.

## HIGHWAY TO THE DANGER ZONE

**The multi-tiered stages introduced in Dead Or Alive 2 have become a defining feature of the series – here's an example of how they work**
















**POINT 1**
Starting at the top of Dragon Hill, you have a limited amount of flat floor space, lots of open ledges and breakable wooden windows, meaning that the fight can take one of many directions…

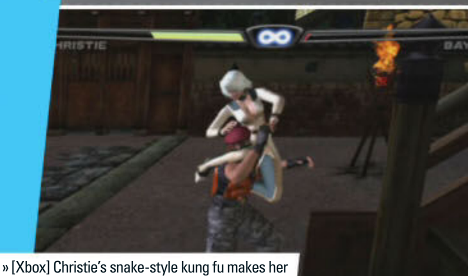
**POINT 2**
This second rooftop is much like the starting one with the same flat floor, but with solid walls and only one place to fall to. Why not get your opponent there in style with a throw?

**POINT 3**
This long and slightly sloped area has two sides that are comprised completely of solid walls. You can knock your opponents through those seemingly solid wooden fences and windows, though…

**POINT 4**
This temple is absolutely stunning to look at, and can be reached through the wooden windows. There's lots of floor space in here, with solid walls all round and only a few stairs to worry about.

**POINT 5**
The final area of Dragon Hill is a long sloped area similar to the previous one. However, this one has fully solid walls as you've reached the bottom of the hill and can't fall down further.


» [Xbox] Even when lounging on the floor, drunken master Brad Wong can initiate deadly leg sweeps.


» [Xbox] Christie's snake-style kung fu makes her one of the series' most slippery customers.

# TAKING IT TO THE XTREME

## The spin-off series that offers the most gratuitous fan service…

As *Dead Or Alive* grew in popularity over the years, the team at Tecmo was faced with a dilemma. "We noticed that some of our old and loyal fans were split in two different groups, fans of the fighting gameplay and fans of our sexy characters," Shimbori explains. "Their interests couldn't be matched, inevitably. So we decided to develop the *Xtreme* series as spin-off for fans who loved the female *DOA* characters as fan service."

The first game in the new non-fighting series was *Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*, released for the Xbox in 2003. As well as playing the titular sport the game focused on the act of building relationships with the other women – and it was just women, as the male characters aren't playable in the *Xtreme* series. This was achieved by partnering with them during games and buying gifts, which could be purchased with money won in games or at the casino. The game was received moderately well overall, but opinions on the game diverged sharply. Eurogamer's 3/10 review opined that "*DOAX* is the mindless, arcade alternative to *Beach Spikers*," whereas IGN's 9.2/10 review claimed that, "The volleyball part of *DOAX* begins as an afterthought to the girls, but really ends up being the greatest strength of the game."

A sequel followed for the Xbox 360 in 2006, this time named *Dead Or Alive Xtreme 2*. Volleyball took a bit of a back seat to a variety of new mini-games, including jet ski races, water slide riding and the 'Butt Battle,' which is *exactly* what it sounds like. The game received a less positive critical reception than its predecessor, with reviewers generally criticising a weaker volleyball game and frustrating mechanics in the other mini-games. A remade handheld version of the game titled *Dead Or Alive Paradise* appeared in 2010 to even worse critical reception. It also attracted some controversy, as the ESRB in North America had to retract a classification stating that, "Parents and consumers should know that the game contains a fair amount of 'cheesy', and at times, creepy voyeurism – especially when users have complete rotate-pan-zoom control; but the game also contains bizarre, misguided notions of what women really want (if given two weeks, paid vacation, island resort) – *Paradise* cannot mean straddling felled tree trunks in dental-floss thongs."

*Dead Or Alive Xtreme 3* should be available on import for the PS4 and Vita as you read this, featuring an expanded focus on dating, new mini-games such as rock climbing and even swimsuit malfunctions (yes, really). The game is not scheduled to be released outside of Asian markets, reportedly due to criticism over the portrayal of women in games, but the English language version is region-free on both platforms.






» [Dreamcast] Tag-team fighting was a hugely appealing addition to *Dead Or Alive 2*.

"The memory we need almost doubles compared to one-on-one matches," elaborates Shimbori. "With our tech it's between 1.5 times to 1.7 times additional memory to present four characters at once. It's still large. However, we do not want to level down the graphics, so it's always been a big challenge to achieve smooth, speedy gameplay with high level of graphics." As it turns out, technological challenges are only the beginning. "Balancing characters in tag mode is always a headache," Shimbori continues. "As you know, balancing fighting game characters is simply not easy and if you combine characters with unique moves in the mode there are millions of patterns that I have to think about. Can you imagine that?"

Console ports arrived in 2000 to universally positive reception. GameSpot's 9.1/10 review of the Dreamcast version stated that, "No other 3D (or even 2D) fighter matches *DOA2* for sheer intensity and speed." IGN's 8.7/10 review of the updated PS2 release *Dead Or Alive 2: Hardcore* lauded, "Its level design is a giant leap beyond anything a serious fighting game has ever done." The game received a number of updates over the course of its life – the initial North America Dreamcast release featured 33 costumes and ten stages, with each subsequent release adding content until the final version, the Japanese PS2 release of *Dead Or Alive Hard*Core*, had 91 costumes and 20 stages.

### DID YOU KNOW?

*In games where the ages of characters are listed, Western versions choose to omit that detail for characters below the age of 18 – including Kasumi and Ayane.*



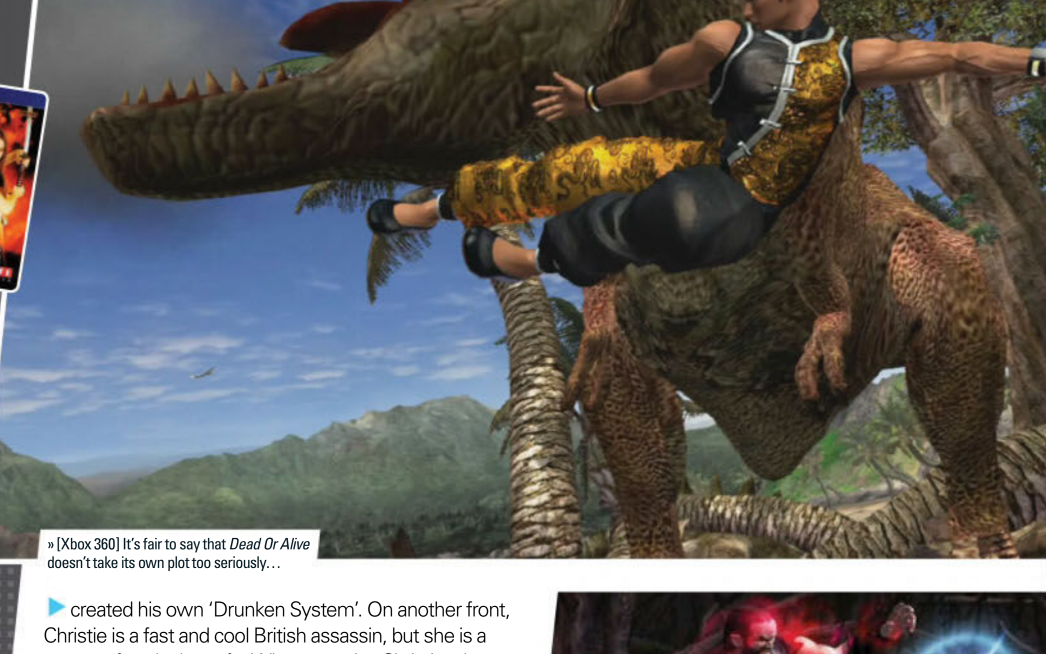

» [Xbox] *Dead Or Alive Ultimate* was a very thorough remake that distinguished itself from the original.

» [Dreamcast] Newcomer Ein delivers a vicious knee to the back of Jann Lee's head.

The next sequel arrived much sooner, as *Dead Or Alive 3* was released in time for the launch of the Xbox in November 2001, kicking off five years in which Team Ninja provided exclusive support for the console newcomers, as well as breaking the connection to arcades that the series had previously had. The game was more of an evolutionary sequel than the revolutionary change that *Dead Or Alive 2* had been, as it retained the majority of its predecessor's features, albeit with an increase in the number of mid-stage hazards such as trees and rock formations.

The biggest change came in the form of new characters – Hitomi provided a karate fighter to replace Ein, who had regained his identity as Hayate. The other newcomers employed unorthodox martial arts, and were designed to contrast from one another. In fact, examining them provides an interesting insight into the series' design philosophy and attempts to appeal to diverse audiences. "We always think that various people in a wide demographic range can enjoy the game by for example mixing major martial arts and minor martial arts, by offering controls that range from easy to difficult, and male and female characters," Shimbori begins.

"For example Brad Wong is a kung fu star, a drunken boxing master. He has many poses and stances and he's difficult to control. His opponents can't read his moves easily. His motion is very unique and we


» [Xbox 360] It's fair to say that *Dead Or Alive* doesn't take its own plot too seriously…

# BOX OFFICE BUST

## *How Dead Or Alive's film adaptation failed to live up to expectations*

Back in 2006, when *Dead Or Alive* was celebrating its tenth anniversary, the series was honoured with one of the more dubious rewards brought about by videogame success: a licensed film adaptation. On paper, the idea was sound. Corey Yuen, who had given Jean Claude Van Damme his first starring role, and was responsible for *The Transporter*, was signed as the director, while producers Paul W.S. Anderson and Jeremy Bolt had the relatively successful adaptations of *Mortal Kombat* and *Resident Evil* on their CVs.

The film itself stuck relatively closely to the plot of the games, as it centred on the *Dead Or Alive* fighting tournament and its various participants. Kasumi (Devon Aoki) and Hayabusa (Kane Kosugi) are out to find Hayate (Collin Chou), while being pursued by Ayane (Natassia Malthe). Tina and Bass (Jaime Pressly and Kevin Nash) alternate between supportive and antagonistic of each other as usual, Christie (Holly Valance) is out to grab riches and Zack (Brian J White) is a bit of a sleazy jerk.

Unfortunately, those elements did not turn into a great movie. Criticism focused on the film's thin plot and weak performances, and even the action sequences – typically one of Corey Yuen's strengths – were marred by a lack of impact, as critics noted that nobody ever seemed to get hurt. The film bombed at the box office too, recouping less than half of its reported budget. Ultimately, if you get a kick out of the *Street Fighter* movie you'll probably like *DOA: Dead Or Alive* in a similarly ironic way.





created his own 'Drunken System'. On another front, Christie is a fast and cool British assassin, but she is a master of snake kung fu. When you play Christie, she executes fast attacks and moves on and on by simply mashing buttons. This feature is the result of the fact that we prioritise easy playability, simple fun, so users could experience a kung fu master in *Dead Or Alive*. The gap between their outlook and their moves is Team Ninja's sheer persistence."

*Dead Or Alive 3* was positively received by the press and public alike, selling over a million copies within its first five months of release. Particular praise was reserved for the game's visuals – IGN's 9.4/10 review noted, "Never before in any fighting game, or any video game for that matter, has there been such a godly display of visual detail." Criticism focused on the game's similarity to its predecessor – Game Revolution gave the game a B grade, stating, "This game is so similar to *Dead Or Alive 2* that calling it a sequel should only refer to the graphics."

The wait for *Dead Or Alive 4* proved to be a long one, but players were held over with the introduction of the *Dead Or Alive Xtreme* spin-off series and an interim fighting game. "After *Dead Or Alive 3* was launched, Team Ninja was tasked with developing an online match system," Shimbori explains. "*Dead Or Alive 3* wasn't launched to arcades in Japan. So we knew there were many users who wanted to play with their friends." The result of this was 2004's *Dead Or Alive Ultimate*. This package featured an Xbox conversion of the original *Dead Or Alive*, based on the Saturn version, as well as an enhanced remake of *Dead Or Alive 2* with all-new visuals and stage designs – and both games were fully playable online over Xbox Live.

Returning to the second game seems like an unusual step back, but according to Shimbori there was a good reason for it. "It was possible for us to make *Dead Or Alive 3* online compatible, but we did not, because it was designed and adjusted in the concept of a 'fighting action game' with more freedom of movement in stages and offensive balance adjustment for some characters. It was designed as a single player game. So it wasn't good for fair multiplayer," he recalls. "Since we were confident of the balance of *Dead Or Alive 2* we based *Dead Or Alive Ultimate* on that."


» [PS4] Honoka is hugely popular with fans in Japan, owing to her cute image.


» [3DS] *Dead Or Alive*'s Nintendo debut retold the whole story, allowing the return of old characters like Raidou.

**While new content was largely limited to the online modes and new slope Danger Zones which gradually reduced your character's health as they tumbled** down, the game was still received positively overall. Most of the division came over the online functions. Eurogamer's 8/10 review posited that it was "a new benchmark for online fighting games to be measured by". *Games™*'s 7/10 review stated that it was only as good as your broadband connection.

When *Dead Or Alive 4* eventually arrived in the final days of 2005, it was as a flagship game for Microsoft's new Xbox 360, the first console to offer high definition graphics as a standard feature. For Team Ninja, which had spent an entire generation pushing technological boundaries, the move to more powerful hardware was a welcome one. "There were many things we could do for this title, for example, cross-simulation of hair or cloth, motion blur and fur shaders," Shimbori recalls, although there's naturally a caveat. "We had

> **"We had to keep running at 60fps, so it's been challenging"**
> Yohei Shimbori

to keep running at 60fps, so it's been always quite challenging. Of course, we could use more texture. Not only for the visual aspect of the game, but for the audio ones as well. *Dead Or Alive 4* had the best sound among its competitors in those days."

Apart from shuffling the character roster around, bringing the likes of Eliot and Kokoro in and including SPARTAN-458 as a crossover with Microsoft's *Halo* series, *Dead Or Alive 4*'s biggest innovation was the addition of moving hazards in stages. Whether you were avoiding cars in the street or dinosaurs in the jungle, there was often a chance that you could be hit by a passing hazard. The other big difference was difficulty – following the reputation that Team Ninja had developed for difficult games with its revival of *Ninja Gaiden*, *Dead Or Alive 4* made fights much harder and included humiliating achievements worth zero points as a 'reward 'for particularly poor play.

The fighting series took a break following *Dead Or Alive 4*, though it was rarely far from the headlines as Tomonobu Itagaki split from Tecmo in 2008, suing his former employer over allegations of unpaid bonuses before settling out of court in 2010 – by which time, the company had merged with Koei. Team Ninja continued to work on the series without him, and in 2011 released *Dead Or Alive Dimensions* for the Nintendo 3DS. To celebrate the 15th anniversary of the series, the game functioned as a greatest hits compilation. The game did well with critics, though problems were noted with the game's performance if 3D mode was enabled.

### DID YOU KNOW?

*Dead Or Alive Ultimate* was ported to PC as *Dead Or Alive Online* in 2008, but it failed to progress past its beta stage and was closed permanently in 2011.

The series returned to non-handheld consoles in 2012 with *Dead Or Alive 5* for the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. The game introduced newcomers Rig, an amnesiac industrial worker, and Mila, a Spanish mixed martial artist, but the bigger addition was of three familiar faces in Akira Yuki, Sarah Bryant and Pai Chan. "We've learned many things from *Virtua Fighter*, so first of all we can say *Dead Or Alive* wouldn't be in the world without it," Shimbori remarks. "We wanted to collaborate with them. It was a dream come true for us to work with the title that gave birth to *DOA*."

**As is customary, *DOA5* goes the extra mile when it comes to visuals – fighters become sweaty and clothes get dirty over the course of fights, and even the arenas themselves can start** moving. New 'Power Blows' were implemented, simple attacks that produced multi-hit comeback combos when fighters were at low health. These could even trigger crazy events when aimed at Danger Zones. The other big change was the biggest wardrobe in any *Dead Or Alive* game ever, though with a caveat – most of the costumes were only available as DLC.

The initial reception for *Dead Or Alive 5* was weaker than that of other games in the series. The initial release took place during a period of strong competition amongst 3D fighting games, with *Virtua Fighter 5: Final Showdown* and *Tekken Tag Tournament 2* arriving around the same time, and the critical consensus was that *Dead Or Alive 5* was good but not as deep as either of its competitors. Updated versions followed in the form of *Dead Or Alive 5 Ultimate* in 2013 and *Dead Or Alive 5 Last Round* in 2015, each of which added new characters and stages, and the most recent update is still receiving new DLC at the time of writing.

Two decades after the inception of the series, *Dead Or Alive* is a key player in the fighting game market. "The popularity of *Dead Or Alive* comes from the fact that the game caters for a range of users, from beginners to pro players, by offering deep playability depending on the level of the player," replies Shimbori when asked why the series has retained its popularity.

For the director, it's all about retaining accessibility while still offering depth. "*Dead Or Alive* has many combos and techniques, but you can win without learning everything. If you want to confirm what I am saying here, please download *Dead or Alive 5 Last Round: Core Fighters* and play with your friends. It's free to play, but it's fully functional. I bet you can execute many combos just by mashing two buttons."

"On the other hand, if the game is just simple and easy, it will easily bore you," he continues. "The other face of *Dead Or Alive* is to offer intricate gameplay – entering at an easy low level and getting you hooked the more you learn how to play. We develop the game in accordance with feedback from top players.

"I think *Dead Or Alive* is the game [with] the most human touch amongst fighting games," concludes Shimbori. "When you find your rival, you can keep playing it forever; and we already know some players that do!" As long as *Dead Or Alive* keeps focusing on entertainment and accessibility, that's definitely possible – where other fighting games cater towards the hardcore player, we've seen *Dead Or Alive* suck entire households into a complex web of rivalries. So while people might show up for the sex appeal, listen to those in the know – there's a lot more to *Dead Or Alive* than bouncing breasts. ✱


» [PS4] Jacky and Sarah from *Virtua Fighter* beat up *Ninja Gaiden*'s Ryu Hayabusa in *Dead Or Alive 5*. Yes, really.


» [PS4] Mila would be more comfortable in a cage, but she provides a new friendly rivalry for Tina.

## COSTUME PARTY

***The Dead Or Alive series features an outrageous number of costumes for each character – could you hold your own wearing any of these?***

**KASUM**
■ *A classic seifuku school uniform from Japan, with a white sailor-style top, red tie and blue skirt and socks.*

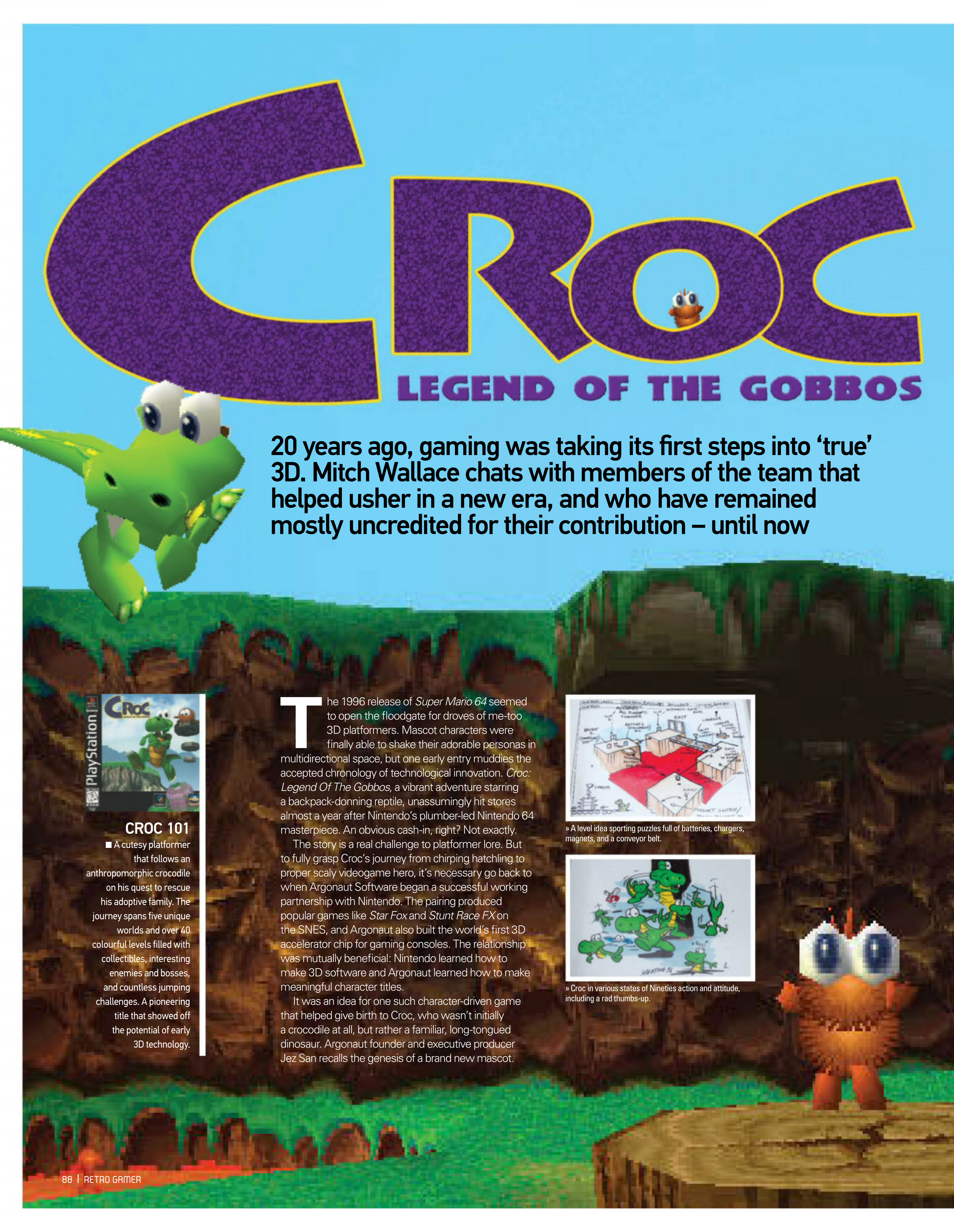
**TINA**
■ *A black cat-themed outfit with a plunging neckline. A collar is attached to the shoulder pads, and of course there are cat ears.*

**ZACK**
■ *Best described as looking like a shiny Teletubbies outfit, this costume features a antenna and a chest-mounted monitor.*

**JANN LEE**
■ *This full tracksuit is yellow, with silver-trimmed black stripes and inside arm and legs. The ultimate tribute to Bruce Lee.*

**HITOMI**
■ *This Oktoberfest-inspired outfit is predominantly white and red, with long stockings and a green sash around the waist.*





# Croc: Legend of the Gobbos

**20 years ago, gaming was taking its first steps into 'true' 3D. Mitch Wallace chats with members of the team that helped usher in a new era, and who have remained mostly uncredited for their contribution – until now**

### CROC 101

■ A cutesy platformer that follows an anthropomorphic crocodile on his quest to rescue his adoptive family. The journey spans five unique worlds and over 40 colourful levels filled with collectibles, interesting enemies and bosses, and countless jumping challenges. A pioneering title that showed off the potential of early 3D technology.

The 1996 release of *Super Mario 64* seemed to open the floodgate for droves of me-too 3D platformers. Mascot characters were finally able to shake their adorable personas in multidirectional space, but one early entry muddies the accepted chronology of technological innovation. *Croc: Legend Of The Gobbos*, a vibrant adventure starring a backpack-donning reptile, unassumingly hit stores almost a year after Nintendo's plumber-led Nintendo 64 masterpiece. An obvious cash-in, right? Not exactly.

The story is a real challenge to platformer lore. But to fully grasp Croc's journey from chirping hatchling to proper scaly videogame hero, it's necessary go back to when Argonaut Software began a successful working partnership with Nintendo. The pairing produced popular games like *Star Fox* and *Stunt Race FX* on the SNES, and Argonaut also built the world's first 3D accelerator chip for gaming consoles. The relationship was mutually beneficial: Nintendo learned how to make 3D software and Argonaut learned how to make meaningful character titles.

It was an idea for one such character-driven game that helped give birth to Croc, who wasn't initially a crocodile at all, but rather a familiar, long-tongued dinosaur. Argonaut founder and executive producer Jez San recalls the genesis of a brand new mascot.

» A level idea sporting puzzles full of batteries, chargers, magnets, and a conveyor belt.

» Croc in various states of Nineties action and attitude, including a rad thumbs-up.

"[Nintendo] had done a game called *Yoshi's Island*, which used our graphics chip, the Super FX chip. An outside company, HAL [Laboratory], had helped it write that. We put two and two together and thought that maybe Nintendo [were] not so jealously guarding their non-essential characters."

Next came the conceptualisation of something completely unheard of at the time. "Nobody had ever done a 3D platformer game before," Jez recalls. "A guy called Marcus Morgan, who was a skilled 3D animator [at Argonaut]. He used to work Autodesk. He kind of visualized what a 3D *Mario* game might look like."

The result was an exciting prototype that essentially mixed together two Nintendo classics, but in a whole new dimension. "We offered them what we called *Yoshi Racing*, which was a 3D *Mario* game with the Yoshi character," Jez says. "It was probably a cross between *Mario Kart* and *Super Mario World*, a hybrid of a racing game and a platformer. It also looked like *Super Mario 64*, only a year or two earlier."

Argonaut would give Nintendo first dibs on the game – not a contractual agreement between the two companies, but an agreement nonetheless. The initial response was enthusiastic, albeit short-lived. "We showed it to Miyamoto-san and he was blown away," Jez says. "It was clear we were on to something – this was special. It was at that point that they kind of said, 'No, we're not doing it.'"

With that, Nintendo closed the door on the 3D *Yoshi* game, and now Argonaut was free to look elsewhere for publishing support. "Now, obviously, we couldn't offer a *Yoshi* game to anyone else, because that was Nintendo's character," Jez says. "So we had to design, from scratch, a character that would have the same dynamics, that ended up still being green, but otherwise a happy, jumpy crocodile. Not a million miles away from Yoshi, but pretty different."

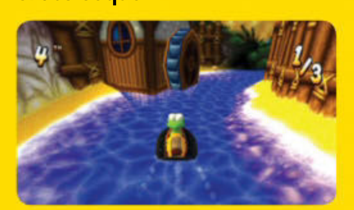
Helping out with the redesign was asset controller-turned-artist Simon Keating. "While sitting in the render farm I had a fair bit of extra time on my hands," he recalls. "So when I heard that Jez was looking for a new character/IP, I started doodling straight away. I came up with a ton of crazy stuff, but the majority of people seemed to want the design pretty close to Yoshi. Croc had one tooth because my cat at the time had just one fang."

Now that the game had a fitting hero, there needed to be a call to adventure. That came in the form of sinister magician Baron Dante and the Dantinis, who show up and start taking Croc's fluffy, big-eyed buddies – the Gobbos. "We wanted something to save," explains lead designer Nic Cusworth. "A crocodile going after a princess to save seemed a bit crazy, so we had almost this Moses story, this character that arrives on this island. The Gobbos try to raise it, and when Croc's brothers and sisters get kidnapped, there's some motivation there."

Simon adds how the fuzzy creatures changed slightly as development progressed: "The Gobbos were always basically fluffy balls, but they started off pink [instead of brown]. They were later refined by animator Pete Day to adapt to 3D better." The game's basis would go on to be fleshed out in the instruction manual, but the team wasn't involved. "I think [publisher Fox Interactive] paid a *Simpsons* writer a load of money to go and write the backstory," Nic says. ▶

# THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF CROC

**We talk to the creators about Crocs sequel**



**Did you want to do anything differently with *Croc 2*?**

**Nic Cusworth**: I had this desire for absolute variety. The hub world, kart racing, boat racing, and the hang glider stuff is an echo to the amount of *Diddy Kong Racing* we were playing at the time.

**Do you think you accomplished what you set out to achieve with the sequel?**

**NC**: In terms of its ambition, I remember *Croc 2* much more fondly than the first one. It's a flawed favourite. I just wish we could go back and fix the camera.

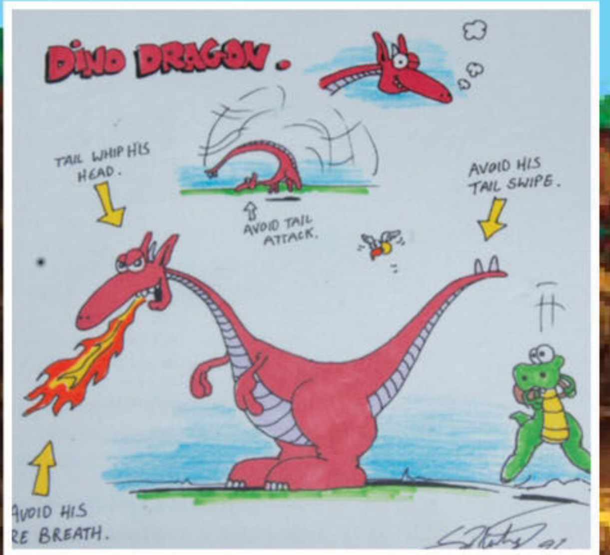
**Was there any talk of a third *Croc* game?**

**NC**: I did propose a *Croc 3*. It used Xbox Live's online functionality; it was kind of a co-op game. People often say to me, 'You should make another *Croc*.' I would only do it if [the original team] came back together.

**Jez San**: When Argonaut died in 2004, I bought the rights to *Croc*, just to protect it. It would be great to get the band back together to work on another game.

**Were there ever any plans to take *Croc* beyond gaming?**

**JS**: There were toys, but they never came out commercially. Little plush Crocs and Gobbos and backpacks. I do have a Croc jacket, though!"



» An abandoned boss concept, complete with possible attacks and means of defeat.


» [PlayStation] Slamming the gong will end the current level, though the curious burrowing snake could make matters more difficult.

> "Croc had one tooth because my cat at the time had just one fang"
> Simon Keating



## INTERVIEW: JUSTIN SCHARVONA

### We chat to Croc's musician

**How did you come to be involved *in Croc: Legend Of The Gobbos*, and in what way did you approach the creative process?**
I had worked in-house at Argonaut since 1994, so when *Croc* came along I had already worked on many published game soundtracks since my first in 1988. The soundtrack in *Croc* was rooted in song-based music. The only mantra I used to go by was that people had to be able to whistle along to the tunes. We hired Steve Levine, the record producer, who was the guy that produced all the Culture Club songs from the Eighties.

**What's behind the seemingly game show-inspired main title theme?**
I wrote the theme tune after hearing a library CD of Mexican music, where one song on it had a rhythmic piano riff. This is why there is a trumpet lead part. It's not meant to be like a game show theme, although the second half ended up being a bit like one. It also has [the music team] clapping around a mic.

**And what about the playfully eerie ambience in the cave stages?**
That music is based on the *Addams Family* theme, with the harpsichord and finger snaps. The theremin idea was from listening to *The Simpsons* Halloween specials. The songs which have the big Hammond organ chords were inspired by working on a version of *Foxy Lady* which was for a *Wayne's World* game.


» In this rare look inside the studio, actor Jonathan Aris records the voiceover for *Croc*. Kapow! Kersplat!

**Any other pop culture nods?**
The Flibby boss fight theme was styled on the *Rocky* theme, and it was Steve Levine that told me to make it less like the film theme so we didn't get sued.

**Did your creative approach change at all when making *Croc 2*?**
The percussion was influenced by listening to *Donkey Kong Country* on the SNES. There is a river race which has *Hawaii Five-0*-style music, and another race which is a bit like the *Knight Rider* theme. The outro final music is a bit like a cross between an Oasis-style *Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds* and Tears for Fears' *Sowing The Seeds Of Love*.

**Listening back now, how do you perceive both titles' soundtracks?**
There is a element of nostalgia created by the soundtracks to the *Croc* games, I still receive messages from people telling me how much they loved the themes.


» [PlayStation] The secret crystal island is only unlocked after finding all the Gobbos and hidden jigsaw pieces in the game.

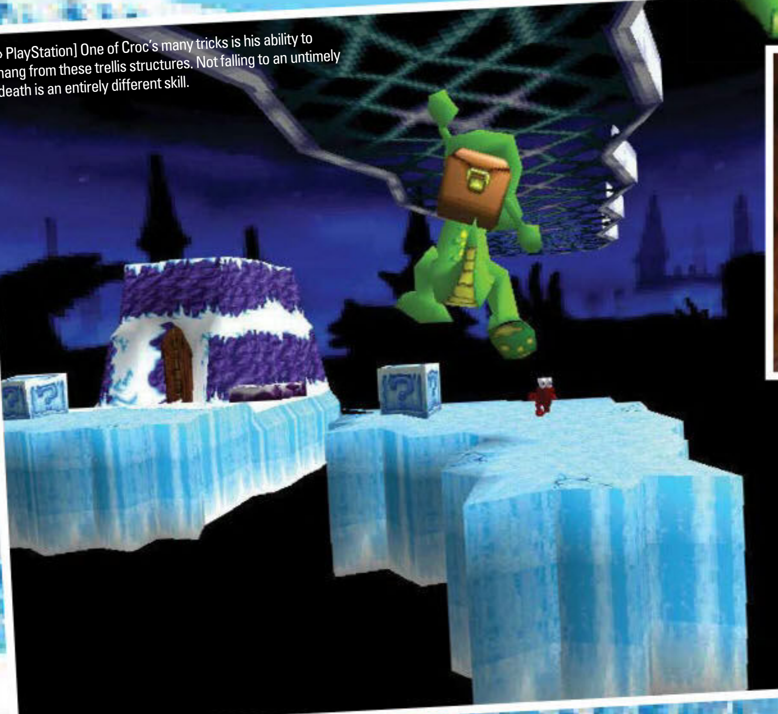
With art and story direction underway, it was time for the game's mechanics to come to life, which presented a massive challenge. The territory for 3D platformers was completely uncharted at the time. "When we started developing it, there was no reference point at all, other than *Yoshi's Island*," Nic remembers. "We were like, 'We should make something like this in 3D. How the hell do we do that?' It's kind of easy with hindsight, to think it's fairly obvious how you approach a platform game in 3D."

While the game would evolve to include a PlayStation version, it was on the Sega Saturn that the original, humble build took shape. "Programmers Lewis Gordon and Anthony Lloyd had a little chubby crocodile running down what were effectively tubular pipes in snow," Nick muses. "Which made no sense whatsoever [laughs]." Anthony elaborates: "It was white polygons, because the Saturn could only render tiles. Everything was very geometric."

And so the basic foundation for *Croc* was set, but now ideas and concepts had to become coding reality. "We had a great team," Jez begins. "We had very good tools and a good engine that allowed us to tweak the game, make changes and see the changes quickly."

"Most of the game is actually written in a language like BASIC but called Argonaut Strategy Language," Anthony adds. "The editor, CrocEd, didn't even run in Windows. It used DOS!" The toolset used to build




» PlayStation] One of Croc's many tricks is his ability to hang from these trellis structures. Not falling to an untimely death is an entirely different skill.


» [PlayStation] The variety of enemies in the game is impressive. Here, a mummy lumbers toward Croc, one clumsy step at a time.


» [PlayStation] Our hero seems awfully calm, especially considering he's being pursued by a giant (and quite angry) spinning cactus.

*Croc* would go on to help create future Argonaut titles. "We reused the original *Croc* engine on many games," Jez says. "*Harry Potter* and *Harry Potter 2*, the Disney *Aladdin* game, and *Alien: Resurrection*."

Nic, who worked extensively within the editor to create the lion's share of *Croc*'s levels, explains its versatility: "In some ways, it was the most free, creative expression within a box of limitations I've ever had on a game. I'd go home at night and think, 'I can do that,' and then come in [to work] in the morning and build a level that does whatever I thought of. The castle levels particularly are all the result of it getting later in development and just going crazy with all the scripting and what the system could do."

*Croc*'s world was broken up into five themed islands, and while the individual levels in *Croc* allowed for plenty of free-roaming, they were divided into smaller sub-sections. "We didn't want to use any depth cue," Nic explains. "We wanted to draw the whole scene. It was about what we could render and light." But it wasn't just technical limitations. "We wanted every room to be its own little puzzle," Nic goes on. "So it felt like an achievement to make it through each area."

And then there were the classic level names, like 'Be Wheely Careful' and 'License To Chill'. "I think I named all of them," Nic says. "They're all puns. They are awful!" He chuckles, recalling how he named the game's first level. "I remember, '...And So The Adventure Begins', was from a David Lee Roth video collection I had. They introduced the California girls, and it was like, 'Okay, that's how *Croc* starts.'" Another level name would find its inspiration in British comedy *Trainspotting*. "Shouting, 'Lager Lager Lager' became 'Lava Lava Lava'," Nic adds.

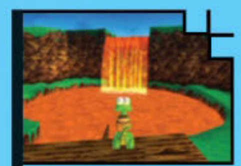
While the Nintendo 64 would ship with a revolutionary analogue controller, other input methods of the time were natively digital. It wasn't until almost the end of *Croc*'s development that Sony released the Dual Analog gamepad—a concave-sticked, non-vibrating (at least in the West) DualShock predecessor. "We got that [controller] a couple weeks before going gold and had to try and remap our digital tank controls over to an analogue stick," Nic says. "I wouldn't say it was very successful."

While none of the characters in the game made use of any sort of traditional dialogue, *Croc* himself did have a hilariously memorable voice. "There was a friend of the audio department," Nic recalls. "An actor named Jonathan Aris, a very fine young actor used to doing much more intellectual stage plays, came in and we just let him loose on a microphone. We showed him the game, and he nailed everything in an hour."

As *Croc* neared the end of its development, Nintendo was, unbeknownst to Argonaut, getting ready to release a 3D platformer of its very own. The result was nothing short of monumental. "Little did we know that Nintendo had effectively run with our idea and produced a game that was very similar [to *Croc*]," Jez says. "*Mario 64* was very similar in concept to what we had shown Miyamoto a year or two earlier. And Miyamoto actually came up to me at the launch at the CES show and apologised for not doing *Yoshi Racing* with us and then doing *Mario 64* instead. He said, 'You'll make enough money. You've made enough money from *Star Fox* and *Stunt Race*. You're not going to worry.' It was a bit hollow."

Hollow indeed, because the truth was abundantly clear: "We weren't the first 3D platform game. We were maybe the second one," Jez admits. "We were the first to start, and we were the first to have the idea, but we weren't the first to come out." But Jez notes that, despite the strange circumstances and the teams eventually parting ways, there aren't any sour grapes to be had. "It didn't really matter," he says. "*Mario 64* is a fantastic game. But *Croc* was a good game too. I'm proud of it. And I think Miyamoto is the best guy in the industry. Our time working with Nintendo was some of the best times we've had. We learned how to design 'fun', which is a very Miyamoto thing." ✱

**Huge thanks to Jez San, Nic Cusworth, Anthony Lloyd, Simon Keating (for the art), and Justin Scharvona for all their help!**



## IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** Fox Interactive (USA)/ Electronic Arts (UK)/ MediaQuest (JPN)
- » **DEVELOPER:** Argonaut Software
- » **RELEASED:** 1997
- » **PLATFORM:** Platformer
- » **SYSTEM:** Various





## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**RED DOG: SUPERIOR FIREPOWER**
**SYSTEM:** Dreamcast
**YEAR:** 1999

**BUCK BUMBLE**
**SYSTEM:** Nintendo 64
**YEAR:** 1998

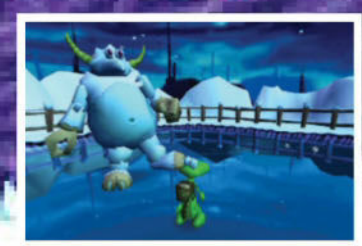
**MALICE** (PICTURED)
**SYSTEM:** Xbox, PS2
**YEAR:** 2004



» Croc explores his Rambo side in this early concept sketch.




» An original piece of art just for **Retro Gamer** by *Croc*'s original character artist Simon Keating! Check out his current work at Rule Of Fun game studio (ruleoffun.com).



» [PlayStation] Meet Itsy the Ice Demon, a boss composed of innocent animals, all mashed together by Baron Dante.



» Pieces of concept art depicting two bosses that made it into the final game: Fosley and Cactus Jack.



> "We wanted every room to be its own little puzzle"
> Nic Cusworth




"Greg [Follis] called me up and asked me to go for an interview as they were looking for a graphic artist. So along I went" Stuart Cox




# STUART COX

**Hired by Gargoyle as a graphic artist, Stuart Cox soon became an instrumental part of the firm's move into developing arcade titles. Rory Milne asks Stuart about coin-op inspirations, licences, internet theories and unreleased games**

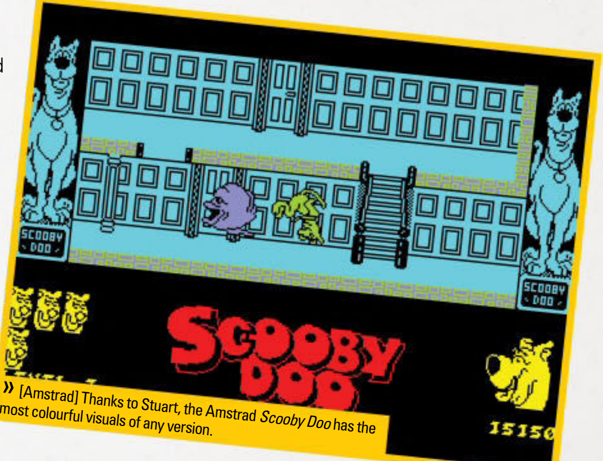
Although his name may not be instantly recognisable, the games that artist Stuart Cox worked on while at Gargoyle Games certainly are. Stuart joined Gargoyle as the label's founders Greg Follis and Roy Carter were expanding their two-man operation. Working under Greg's guidance, Stuart was first tasked with creating visuals for the Spectrum and Amstrad versions of the Elite-published *Scooby Doo*. The then-teenage artist next added C64 graphic design to his resume when he worked on the hit shooter *Lightforce* for the three main 8-bit computers. Stuart's subsequent roles included designing game art for the highly original *Shockway Rider* for Gargoyle's FTL label, and creating visuals for the isometric oddity *Hydrofool* and the cartoon licence *Thundercats*. The last title Stuart produced graphics for – *Supertrux* – was also Gargoyle Games' swan song.

**What were your earliest experiences of videogames?**
I remember being about nine years old and a friend of my sister brought a Binatone Pong to our house. I couldn't quite believe that I was suddenly controlling something on-screen; moving the bat up and down, interacting with it. It was complete voodoo! Shortly afterwards, a friend of my father had an Atari VCS, and we used to go over to their house regularly. I would be plonked in front of it all night, playing *Space Invaders*, *Combat*, *Pac-man* et al, [it was like] heaven. I then got really interested in micros, and I remember eagerly awaiting *Popular Computing Weekly* to come out every Thursday. My parents bought me a Dragon 32 when I was 14 years old. It was a powerful machine at the time, but was sorely lacking in the graphics department. It did, however, give me my first taste of assembly language. Later, my cousin was working for Commodore in Sydney, Australia, and he brought back one of the very first C64 machines before they'd even launched in the UK. Ah, the joys of hardware sprites, and all those colours!

**How did you first come across coders Mark Haden and Jon Simcox?**
When I left school, I went to our local college to study a BTEC in Computing. I met Jon and Mark there; we were all in the same class. The course, however, was dreadful. We were forced to learn COBOL on punched cards, BASIC on a TRS-80, accounts, typing, English, and all manner of other 'course fillers'. It isn't far off the truth to say that the pupils knew much more about the modern computing world than the teachers.

**So how did you all end up working at Gargoyle?**
Gargoyle advertised at the college for trainee programmers to join them as part of the course, I think. Jon and Mark applied and got the jobs. I applied to a company called Software Workshop and got that job instead. Software Workshop was, mainly, a conversion house. I worked there for a short time doing some coding and graphics for a couple of its games. I think *Mermaid Madness* was one of them, *Mugsy* was another, and we started a *1942* rip-off called *Tora Tora*. [Working there] was a little dysfunctional in terms of work environment, so I wasn't sure whether to stay there or not. Then, Jon and Mark must have mentioned me to Gargoyle, because Greg [Follis, Gargoyle cofounder]called me up and asked me to go for an interview as [Gargoyle] was then looking for a graphic artist. So along I went.

**Why did Greg and Roy expand Gargoyle?**
They wanted to get into the arcade side of things. Creating those big adventures was very time consuming, and it was easy to see that you could probably do three arcade games a year as opposed to only two adventure games. Plus, us youngsters understood a lot more about what was currently 'hot' in the arcades and on micros, so it seemed a logical thing for them to do.




» [Amstrad] Thanks to Stuart, the Amstrad *Scooby Doo* has the most colourful visuals of any version.




» [Amstrad] After helping to design the Spectrum *Scooby Doo*'s graphics, Stuart converted them to the Amstrad.

> " Jon, Mark and myself were playing Starforce a lot at college, and we suggested we should make a shoot-'em-up just like it " Stuart Cox

## SELECTED TIMELINE

**GAMES**

- **Scooby Doo** [Various] 1986
- **Lightforce** [Various] 1986
- **Shockway Rider** [Various] 1987
- **Hydrofool** [Various] 1987
- **Thundercats** [Various] 1987
- **Supertrux** [Various] 1988

» [Amstrad] Stuart's love of shoot-'em-ups, and the coin-op *Starforce* in particular, helped inspire Gargoyle's *Lightforce*.

**Did many fans and games journalists contact Gargoyle to ask why you had stopped making adventures?**
We got the occasional letter from someone who was stuck on a puzzle in one of the adventure games, but we rarely got any fan mail. I think the move towards arcade games was quite natural at the time, though, so we didn't really receive comments from either journalists or gamers as far as I can remember. Don't forget, Gargoyle's first ever game was a space shooter called *Ad Astra*, so you could say Gargoyle was turning full circle.

**What do you remember about your first day working at Gargoyle?**
I'm afraid my memory isn't that good, sorry. I do remember the stairs to the offices always smelling of TCP, however. I also remember that it was very quiet. We did have a room full to the brim of toys, though. Plastic guns, hats, you name it.

**How would you describe Gargoyle's offices?**
Our first offices weren't very nice. They were part of a semi-closed-down brewery, and quite old. *Scooby* was born there, and *Lightforce* began early preliminaries there too. But shortly afterwards, we moved to some really nice large offices about three miles away. It was two storeys, with the downstairs being a large open-plan office. We were all in the open-plan area, working in clusters of desks, all together. It was a good layout.

**What was the division of labour at Gargoyle?**
I worked closely with Greg, and Jon and Mark worked closely with Roy. The coding side was handled by Roy, Mark and Jon, and the graphics side was handled by Greg and myself. Jon worked on 6502, Mark worked on Z80. Roy worked between both. All of us had a hand in design, but generally Greg was the lead designer.

**What was working for Greg and Roy like?**
Initially, I didn't really know much about Gargoyle. I was always into arcade games and had never owned a Spectrum. I specifically remember during my interview that Greg said they were not a typical 'young Flash Harry' type of games company and that there would be no PR or name credits on the games at all, and asked if I was bothered by that – to which I replied that I wasn't. I think that was testament to how professional and office-centric the environment was. Greg and Roy came from a business software background and games would be treated no differently by them.

**What were the inspirations for *Lightforce* and *Thundercats*?**
There was a great game in the arcades at the time called *Rygar*. The side-on run-and-gun genre was popular, so it seemed appropriate to make something similar. Myself, Greg and Roy went to a local arcade in Dudley and shovelled 10p pieces into *Rygar* while we studied it. Hence the birth of what eventually became *Thundercats*. *Lightforce* came about in just the same

way. Jon, Mark and myself were playing *Starforce* a lot while we were at college, and we suggested to Roy and Greg that we should make a shoot-'em-up just like it, as shooters were big at the time.

**Did criticism of *Lightforce* bother you given how much it was praised?**
Shoot-'em-ups had always been my favourite type of game, so *Lightforce* was a game I'd always wanted to be a part of. Generally, people really liked it. I remember a journalist from *Sinclair User* coming to our first offices when we'd just got the game engine up and running on Spectrum. He was looking all around the back of the Speccy, behind the TV and following the wires, because he was convinced it wasn't a Spectrum producing the graphics. I think we knew at that point we had something different. We also had a stand at the PCW Game Show at Olympia in 1986, and we were running this same demo on a couple of pods, with the Spectrums inside the cabinets of each pod. We had to open the door more than once to prove it was a Speccy in there, and there were small queues of people waiting to play it. From memory, it was also our best selling game for the company in terms of numbers. From a success point of view it did well. From an originality point of view: nil points…. so I'd say the reviews were accurate.

**How did Gargoyle take the Pickfords' *Lightforce* Mickey-take, *Lightfarce*?**
We all had a very good sense of humour at Gargoyle – somewhat strange, actually – with Monty Python and Douglas Adams being particular favourites. The amount of internal catchphrases we made up was a rich source of humour. For example, one day I came to work and said that I'd had a new shed delivered at home and that I'd now got to get rid of the old one. Straight away, Greg and Roy called me 'Two-sheds Stu'. That stuck for ages. As for *Lightfarce*, that sort of thing would have been met with a smile, for sure.



» [Amstrad] The Amstrad *Hydrofool*'s striking visuals are the result of Stuart adapting the Spectrum original's graphics.

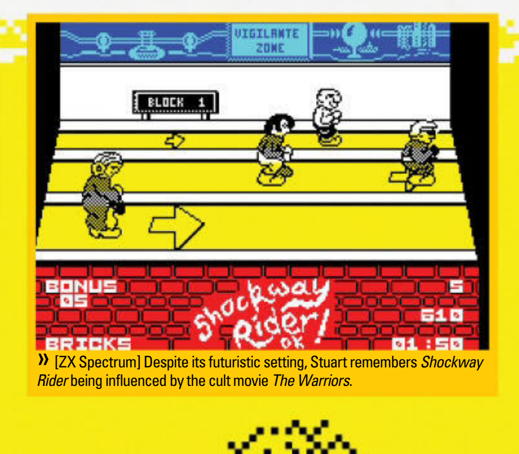
**Did any sci-fi movies or books influence *Shockway Rider*?**
There was a sci-fi book called *Shockwave Rider*, and a couple of things were taken from that, including – virtually – the title. However, it was actually much more influenced by a film called *The Warriors*. The picture on the main menu – the guy who seems to blow on the text – I digitised that from a still from *The Warriors*. Weird fact: the loading screen was me digitised. Greg's idea, not mine.

**Was *Hydrofool* intended to reinvigorate the isometric genre?**
It was all about getting a game quickly to market to help fund development on the bigger titles, and *Sweevo* had sold pretty well. There was life in the isometric genre and people still wanted a sequel. Plus, it was easy and quick to produce. It was almost done in spare time, really.

**Did you have fun working on *Hydrofool*'s subaquatic beasties?**
I didn't have a great level of involvement with the graphics for *Hydrofool*, because Greg had reused a lot of *Sweevo* assets, and created some new ones. My job was to port them over to the Amstrad, which only took a couple of weeks. *Hydrofool* was more of an 'add-on' for *Sweevo*, sharing the same engine with a few tweaks.

**How did designing *Hydrofool*'s gameplay differ from designing gameplay for the arcade titles?**
I was never involved in any of the puzzle designs for previous games, that was most definitely Greg. All the games I worked on were arcade-based. The only puzzle-based game during my tenure was *Hydrofool*, and Greg mainly cooked that up outside the main development time of the FTL games.

**How close to completion were *Hunting Of The Snark, Fornax, Gath, Heavy On The Magick II, George* and *Wunderland*?**
None of those games were ever started. We changed tack from adventure to arcade and stayed there, so the sequels to *Marsport* were never really



» [ZX Spectrum] Despite its futuristic setting, Stuart remembers *Shockway Rider* being influenced by the cult movie *The Warriors*.

## BY THE NUMBERS

**9** The age Stuart was when he played his first videogame.

**1986** The year that Stuart worked on his first Gargoyle Game, *Scooby Doo*.

**14** Stuart's parents bought him a Dragon 32 when he got to this age.

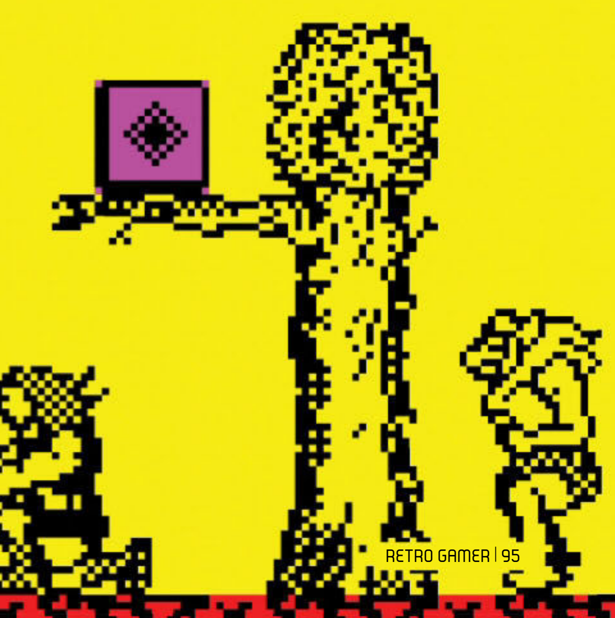
**150,000** Stuart's guess at how many people played a Gargoyle game, most played pirated copies.

**2** How many sheds Stuart was teased for having while at Gargoyle!

**2-3** The days taken for C64 music maestro Rob Hubbard to turn around tunes for Gargoyle's games.

**90%** How complete Stuart reckons Gargoyle's unreleased NES version of *Thundercats* was.

**1942** The name of the coin-op that Stuart started a rip-off of while working at Software Workshop.








considered. In the case of *George*, there was a little bit of thinking done around making a full-sized head on screen and the user interacting with that, but everything else was simply a title.

**What came first: the design for *Thundercats* or the licence deal?**

Greg took all the old 'running man' graphics from *Tir Na Nog* and played around with them on the Spectrum to produce a running character with a sword. He was then dropped into a parallax scrolling background, complete with run-and-jump mechanics. This character eventually became Lion-O. This proof of concept engine came a while before the *Thundercats* licence.

**Did Rob Hubbard create music for a Gargoyle project codenamed '*Wolf*' that eventually became *Thundercats*?**

Yes, the working title was *Wolf*. Rob Hubbard's first project for us was the C64 music for *Lightforce*, and quite a classic it was. Rob then went on to do the music for *Shockway* and *Thundercats*. He was an incredibly fast worker, turning around tunes in two to three days from order to delivery.

**Was *Samurai Dawn* adapted to fit the *Thundercats* licence?**

I've seen this suggestion several times on the Internet over the years. I certainly don't remember the 'running man' being planned as *Samurai Dawn*. That proof of concept had a working title of '*Wolf*'. We had three flyers made in 1986: *Lightforce*, *Shockway Rider* and *Samurai Dawn* – we were advertising forthcoming games in a couple of different genres to see which ones garnered the most interest. At the time, karate games were big. I don't have any memory of why a screenshot of *Wolf* ended up being in a magazine with the title of *Thundercats*, though, I'm afraid.

**What do you remember about *Samurai Dawn*?**

Greg often commissioned artwork for adverts without a clear plan for a game, and the *Samurai Dawn* advert was done at the same time as the ones for *Lightforce* and *Shockway Rider* as an 18-month plan of three games. *Hydrofool* was injected in the middle of that plan quite suddenly, because it could be based largely on the *Sweevo* engine. So a new game could be created much quicker than one of the FTL games that were created from scratch.

**Were *Thundercats*' digitised graphics challenging to create?**

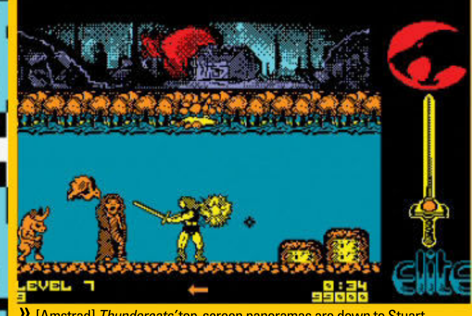
Yes they were. I started experimenting with a video camera and Sunshine – or was it Sunrise? – Digitiser on the Spectrum shortly after *Lightforce* was finished, and going into *Shockway Rider*. The research was all done for *Shockway*, so by the time I got on to *Thundercats* the process was quite well honed down. The actual digitised output was still quite poor, though, and was only used as a framework before loading it into an art package. There I would rework it and add colour. It was time-consuming, but it was certainly different at the time and added a uniqueness to the games.

**How far along did Gargoyle get with the NES version of *Thundercats*?**

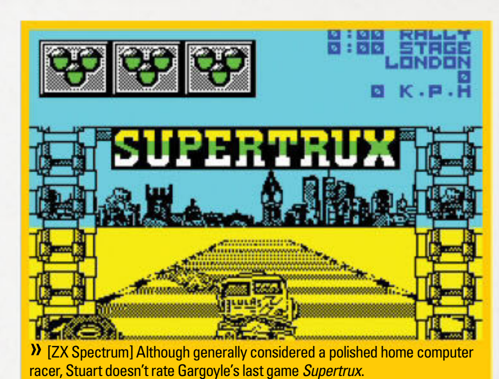
A long way. As far as I remember it was complete. Certainly it was at least 90 per cent or so. It was much more *Mario*-centric. Lion-O was smaller and cuter, and the baddies were less, well, 'bad'. It played really, really well and was great fun. It fitted right at home in the Nintendo catalogue at the time… such a shame it never saw the light of day. For sheer fun and playability, I'd honestly say it was one of our best.

**Did you 'research' *Supertrux* using Greg and Roy's 2.8 Granadas?**

The trading estate where we were based was quite strict. I remember one winter's day we'd had snow, and I was doughnuting my car for fun on a




» [Amstrad] *Thundercats'* top-screen panoramas are down to Stuart experimenting with a video camera, digitiser and art package.




» [ZX Spectrum] Although generally considered a polished home computer racer, Stuart doesn't rate Gargoyle's last game *Supertrux*.

# FIVE TO PLAY

The best Gargoyle games that Stuart Cox produced art for

## SCOOBY DOO 1986

■ This platformer provided Stuart with his introduction to game art design when he joined Gargoyle halfway through its development. The title's quick gameplay forces players into a constant state of fight or flight as they attempt to guide Scooby through a series of monster-infested stages.



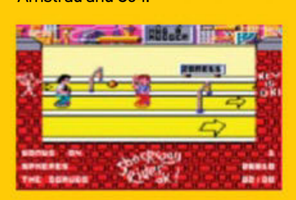


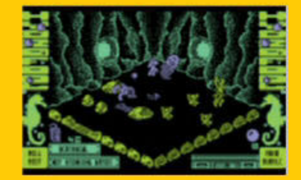

## LIGHTFORCE 1986

■ A cheeky riff on the Tehkan coin-op *Star Force*, Gargoyle's forced-scrolling shooter was celebrated on its release – especially the colourful Spectrum version. But *Lightforce* captures the gameplay of its inspiration in its C64 and CPC iterations too, with each game's visuals tailored to each host system's strengths.

## SHOCKWAY RIDER 1987

■ Underrated or overlooked by many, *Shockway Rider*'s highly original premise tasks players with jumping between conveyer belts in order to avoid or attack thugs. The game's futuristic setting isn't visually referenced much, but its attractive comic-like graphics work equally well on the Spectrum, Amstrad and C64.



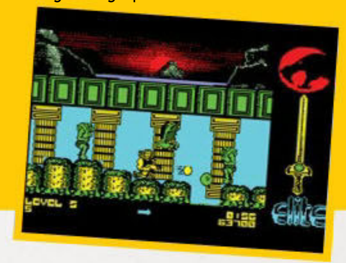


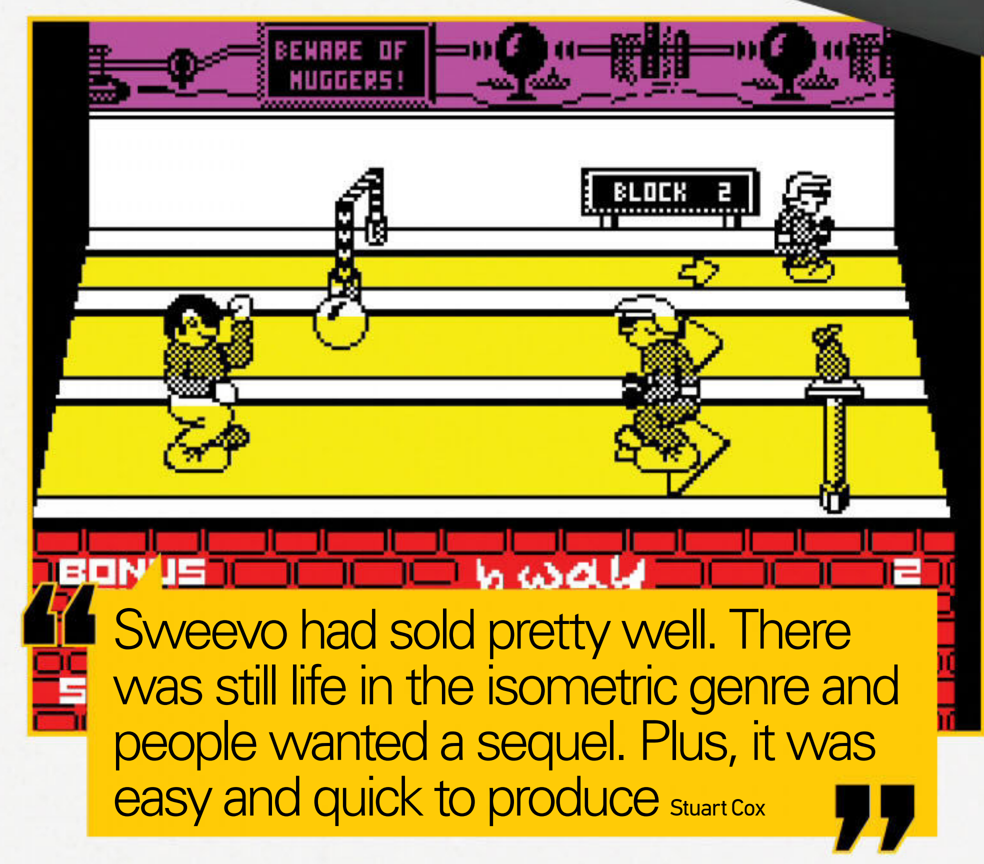
## HYDROFOOL 1987

■ The sequel to Gargoyle's earlier isometric hit *Sweevo's World*, *Hydrofool* takes the humorous puzzling of its predecessor underwater. As well as facilitating an ingenious swimming mechanic, *Hydrofool*'s setting also inspired Stuart's mentor Greg Follis to create a menagerie of ocean dwelling oddities for the game.

## THUNDERCATS 1987

■ Although it takes its lead from Tecmo's *Rygar*, *Thundercats* boasts unique gameplay thanks to its lead character fighting with a sword or gun rather than a chained shield like the protagonist of its arcade muse. *Thundercats* also has a style all of its own, in part thanks to its clever use of digitised graphics.






> Sweevo had sold pretty well. There was still life in the isometric genre and people wanted a sequel. Plus, it was easy and quick to produce Stuart Cox

massive car park. At home time, as I drove towards the gatehouse, the barriers came down and the 'Head Of Fun' in a cap gave me a stern talking to, and wouldn't lift the barriers until I'd received a lecture on the merits of health and safety. Actually, I ended up driving those cars quite a lot because I did more 'out of office' work than the others. I would regularly be driving across the city to the art and print company that created all our cover art, logos and adverts. I also went to the duplication companies several times too. I remember one evening waiting for the final 'save' of *Lightforce*, I think it was, and then bombing up to Leeds in Greg's car to the duplicators to get it mastered and duplicated before the deadline.

**Was *Supertrux* the result of the racing genre having already featured most other vehicles?**
*Supertrux* was a game commissioned by Elite because they'd bought the official licence. They gave us the remit and told us to go lorry racing. Jon, Mark and Roy did some reverse-engineering of existing titles to see how others performed the track rendering, and I did the graphics using a combination of digitising and pixel pushing. My honest opinion is that it's a poor game by our standards. The graphics aren't great, the movement isn't smooth and the gameplay is fairly boring.

**Were *Supertrux*'s reviews to blame for it being Gargoyle's last game?**
*Supertrux* was right at the end of Gargoyle's gaming period. The industry was in a serious state of flux. During this time we'd already started developing business software, such as a POS and an electronic till system called Instore4, and a graphical user interface for PC's along the lines of GEM. Therefore, our attention was divided. Also, I seem to remember there was something going wrong with the Elite side of things too… Everyone was suffering.

**Which 8-bit system did you like developing for?**
I enjoyed different computers for different reasons. I did all the big Spectrum graphics, such as title screens, loading screens, logos, etc.. The Speccy had a higher resolution compared to the others, but the colour aspect was terrible. It was a real art to be able to colour things up without attribute clash. The Amstrad had two different modes that we used. There was the high-res mode similar to the Spectrum where we'd port the graphics over and then colour them up. The second mode on Amstrad was lower-res but better colours. I really enjoyed this mode because you could make some nice bas-relief graphics. The NES was very similar to the C64, with almost similar resolution and colour palette. The sprites were only 8x8, if I remember rightly, though, making it tricky to do larger characters. Finally there was the C64: hardware sprites and nice colours, but chunky resolution. On the whole, I'd say this was my favourite machine. You could make some really silky smooth movement on the 64 with bit-shifting. And with a little raster interrupt malarkey you could have sprites blasting all over the screen. It was a proper mini arcade machine.

**Why didn't Greg and Roy go on to make 16-bit games?**
I think they wanted to get back into the more stable business side again, back to their roots in effect. Piracy was rife, and it was a little soul-destroying to have a successful game that 150,000 people were playing but you'd actually only sold a fraction of that. Plus, the distributors and retailers cuts were brutal.

**How long after *Supertrux* did the Gargoyle team stay together?**
Mark left around this time, I think. I was there for probably six months more. I'm not actually sure how long Jon stayed on afterwards, but I think we had all left within a year, sadly. For me personally, it was a very difficult decision, because I really enjoyed working there and had the highest respect for Greg and Roy. They were consummate professionals, ingenious at what they did, and gave me a great foundation for the future.

**What games did you work on post-Gargoyle?**
I never worked on a complete game after that, but did write demos, music and graphics for the burgeoning demo scene. I also did some PD work around the early Nineties on Amiga. Those demos ended up being on public domain disks such as 17 Bit PD. Just for fun, I wrote mini-games for my own amusement, but by this time I was living abroad and Windows was coming in – with all the fun of a wet lettuce.

**How did Amiga/PC development compare to 8-bit development?**
It was good and bad. With the higher resolution and extended colours you could create wonderful graphics. It was also a lot easier too. The tools were superb: want an alien ship on its side? Use the rotate tool. Want to change the hue and saturation? Move a slider. It was incredible, really, but also a lot less skilful than trying to eke out a mole-man in an 8x8 box.

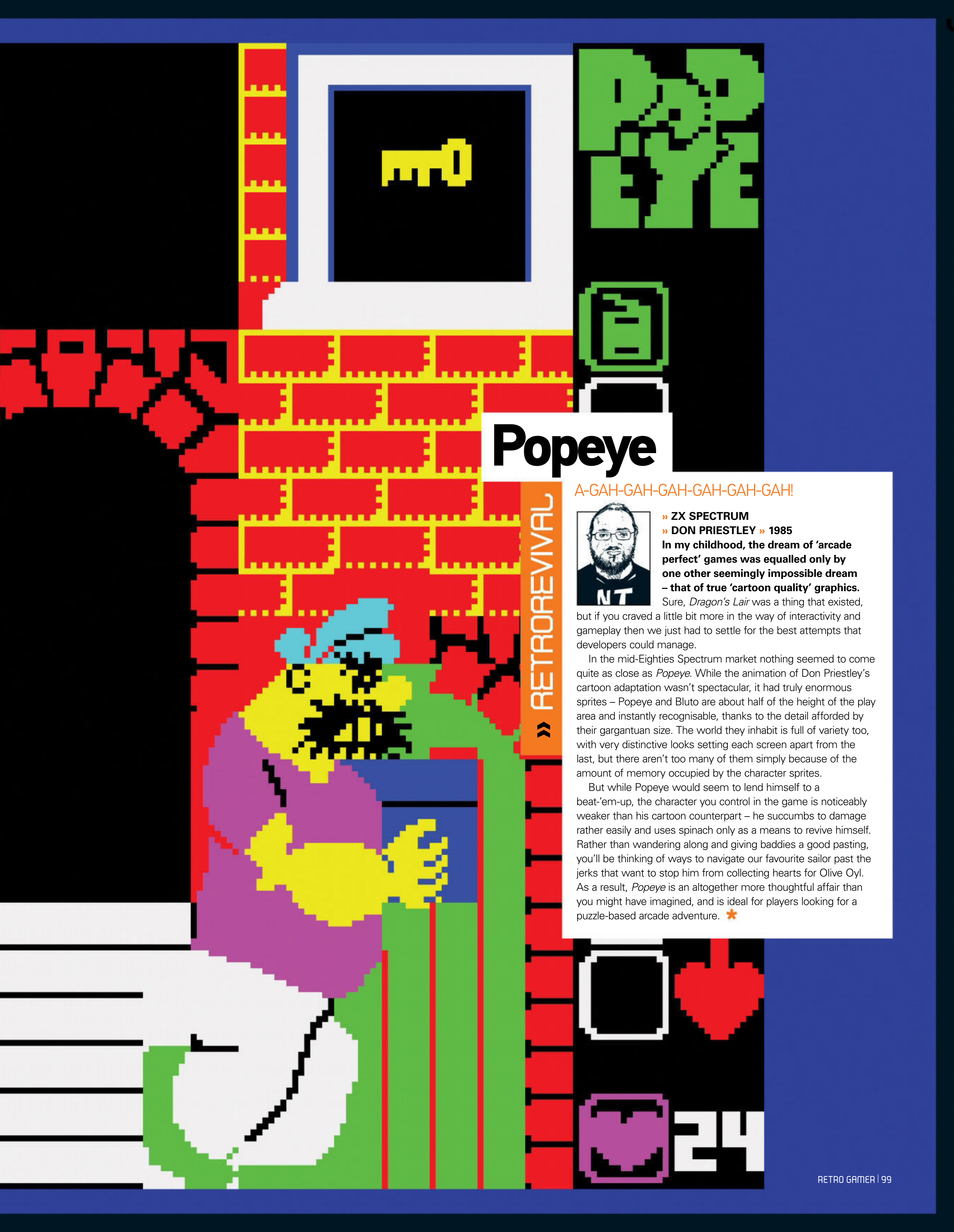
**Why do you think Greg and Roy decline interviews these days?**
It's not really for me to speculate on that.

**Are you still in touch with the Gargoyle guys?**
I recently asked Roy to help me with a couple of projects, which he did willingly – he is still a very talented programmer, and I spoke to Greg on the telephone last year – very nice to talk to him again, but I haven't seen Jon or Mark since Gargoyle.

**Are you ever tempted to return to the world of videogame development?**
I haven't ever left technology, and to this day my life is based around it. I have been involved in other gaming projects over the years. I am still in what could be termed 'IT Entertainment' even now. Maybe I will look at games again… Certainly talking to you has piqued my interest. ★

**Many thanks to Stuart for talking about his Gargoyle days.**






» RETROREVIVAL

# Popeye

## A-GAH-GAH-GAH-GAH-GAH-GAH!

**» ZX SPECTRUM**
**» DON PRIESTLEY » 1985**

**In my childhood, the dream of 'arcade perfect' games was equalled only by one other seemingly impossible dream – that of true 'cartoon quality' graphics.** Sure, *Dragon's Lair* was a thing that existed, but if you craved a little bit more in the way of interactivity and gameplay then we just had to settle for the best attempts that developers could manage.

In the mid-Eighties Spectrum market nothing seemed to come quite as close as *Popeye*. While the animation of Don Priestley's cartoon adaptation wasn't spectacular, it had truly enormous sprites – Popeye and Bluto are about half of the height of the play area and instantly recognisable, thanks to the detail afforded by their gargantuan size. The world they inhabit is full of variety too, with very distinctive looks setting each screen apart from the last, but there aren't too many of them simply because of the amount of memory occupied by the character sprites.

But while Popeye would seem to lend himself to a beat-'em-up, the character you control in the game is noticeably weaker than his cartoon counterpart – he succumbs to damage rather easily and uses spinach only as a means to revive himself. Rather than wandering along and giving baddies a good pasting, you'll be thinking of ways to navigate our favourite sailor past the jerks that want to stop him from collecting hearts for Olive Oyl. As a result, *Popeye* is an altogether more thoughtful affair than you might have imagined, and is ideal for players looking for a puzzle-based arcade adventure. *




>> This month we investigate the HD remake of Twilight Princess. We also wade through a lavish box set dedicated to the games of Revolution Software and go head-to-head with a new Pokémon fighting game




» [Wii U] The dungeons are still amazing and hold up exceptionally well after a decade.

# The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess HD

## YOU CAN TEACH AN OLD WOLF NEW TRICKS

### INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WII U
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £49.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** TANTALUS, NINTENDO EAD
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

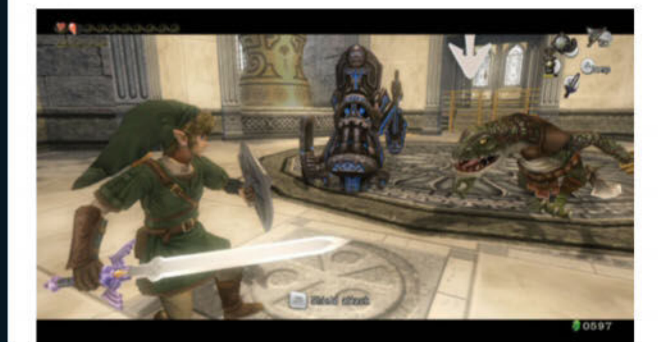
» [Wii U] *Twilight Princess* features the same lock-on system found on all 3D *Zelda* games. It's a little clunky in Link's wolf form, though.




If Nintendo has proven one thing since the release of *Ocarina Of Time 3D*, it's that it certainly knows how to make a great update of classic *Zelda* games. *Ocarina Of Time, Majora's Mask* and *The Wind Waker* have all received notable upgrades that not only improve the games aesthetically, but also add other essential upgrades to justify a second purchase.

Things are no different with the HD release of *Twilight Princess*. As with *The Wind Waker*, a significant amount of texture work has been done to *Twilight Princess*, particularly on characters ensuring they remain nice and vibrant, while keeping the distinctive style of the original game. The frame-rate is at 30 frames per second too, a conscious choice by Nintendo and while it's off-putting it certainly isn't a dealbreaker. As with *Ico, Metal Gear Solid* and a handful of other updates, there has been a genuine amount of hard work in making sure that the game looks as good as it possibly can and it's good to see Nintendo and developer Tantalus go the extra mile.

In addition to some revamped visuals, various gameplay mechanics have also been refined. *Twilight Princess HD* uses the original GameCube version as a base, meaning everything will look mirrored if you only ever played the Wii version. As with *The Wind Waker HD* the Wii U's GamePad can be used to easily manipulate Link's inventory. It also makes switching between forms far easier too. You can aim projectiles with the GamePad's motion controls, while a new Ghost Lantern makes it a lot simpler to find Poe Souls. Other changes include the ability to use Hero Mode (which is based on the Wii



### BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *The Legend Of Zelda* was released on the Famicom/NES in 1986 and introduced players to hero Link, Princess Zelda and the world of Hyrule. There are currently 17 games in the main series, as well as various spin-offs including *Hyrule Warriors* and *Link's Crossbow Training*. An 18th game, *The Legend Of Zelda Wii U*, is due later this year.







### PICKS OF THE MONTH



**DARRAN**
**Revolution: 25th Anniversary Collection**
A superb bundle of games that features great extras and lots of gameplay.




**NICK**
**Trackmania: Turbo**
Time attack racers appeal to me, and *Trackmania*'s colourful visuals, rollercoaster tracks and crazy jumps won me over!

## CRY WOLF

### Getting to grips with Link's new form

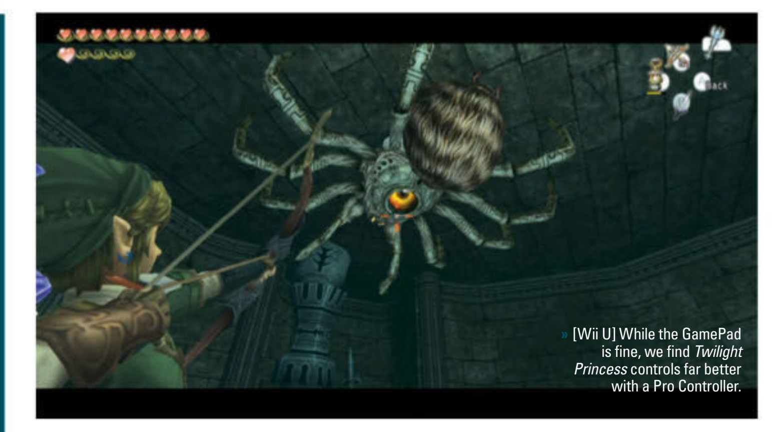
**The big gimmick of *Twilight Princess* is Link's ability to transform into a wolf so he can access the layers of twilight found throughout the world of Hyrule. Clearly influenced by Capcom's *Okami*, Link retains most of his attacks but has the added advantage of using his senses to sniff out trails to follow, as well as useful objects to dig up, typically rupees and hearts. Combat isn't as precise, though, making some sections a chore, particularly when attacking airborne enemies. The wooly combat is further highlighted due to the new challenge dungeon, which is a gauntlet of progressively tougher enemies that must be overcome. The prize, a wallet capable of holding 9,999 rupees, isn't worth the effort.**

### WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
**OKAMI (PLAYSTATION 2)**



▼ SOMETHING NEW
**DARKSIDERS (PC)**



» [Wii U] While the GamePad is fine, we find *Twilight Princess* controls far better with a Pro Controller.

version) from the start, which doubles the amount of damage Link takes. This new HD update also lets you use certain Amiibos to replenish arrows and hearts or even quadruple Link's damage (using Ganondorf). Miiverse Stamps are hidden throughout the game world too, making it feel slightly less empty, while the new Wolf Amiibo adds a brand-new dungeon. Sadly, it's just a variation on the original Cave Of Ordeals and is rather disappointing if we're honest.

One other notable aspect of *Twilight Princess HD* is that it cuts down the amount of Tears Of Light you need to collect from 16 to 12. This is quite significant as it shortens one of the most annoying parts of the original game. While we were incredibly enamoured with it back in the day, it's clear to see that even with the annoying fetch quests pared down a great degree, *Twilight Princess* is still painfully slow in places. It arguably features one of the worst openings of any 3D *Zelda* game and it took around five hours just to reach the first dungeon. Of course, *Zelda* zealots will argue that it's all about the journey and we'd agree to a point, but the larger areas of *Twilight Princess* highlight the game's age and shows how sparse it actually is. While there are lots of open areas, many of them have very little for Link to do and you'll soon get bored traipsing back and fourth through the same empty environments.

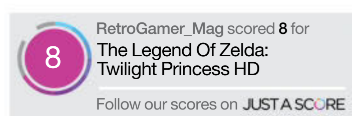
And yet while *Twilight Princess* is certainly showing its age in some respects, it's dungeons remain a thing of beauty. Yes there are obvious parallels with *Ocarina Of Time* – and, let's face it, if you're going to nick ideas, it's the perfect game to steal from – but they still retain their own distinct individuality, from the many monkeys that help you out in the Forest Temple, to the Snowpeak Ruins, which is home to a pair of lovable Yetis. Yes they feel a little linear compared to when we first encountered them ten years ago, but they remain full of clever gameplay elements and lots of inventive touches. One minute you're swinging across of gigantic chasm by dangling from a troop of monkeys, the next you're sticking to the vertical walls of a dungeon via magnetic boots and making difficult arrow shots while hanging upside down from the ceiling. You're still looking for keys, maps and compasses, but you're having a lot of fun doing it.

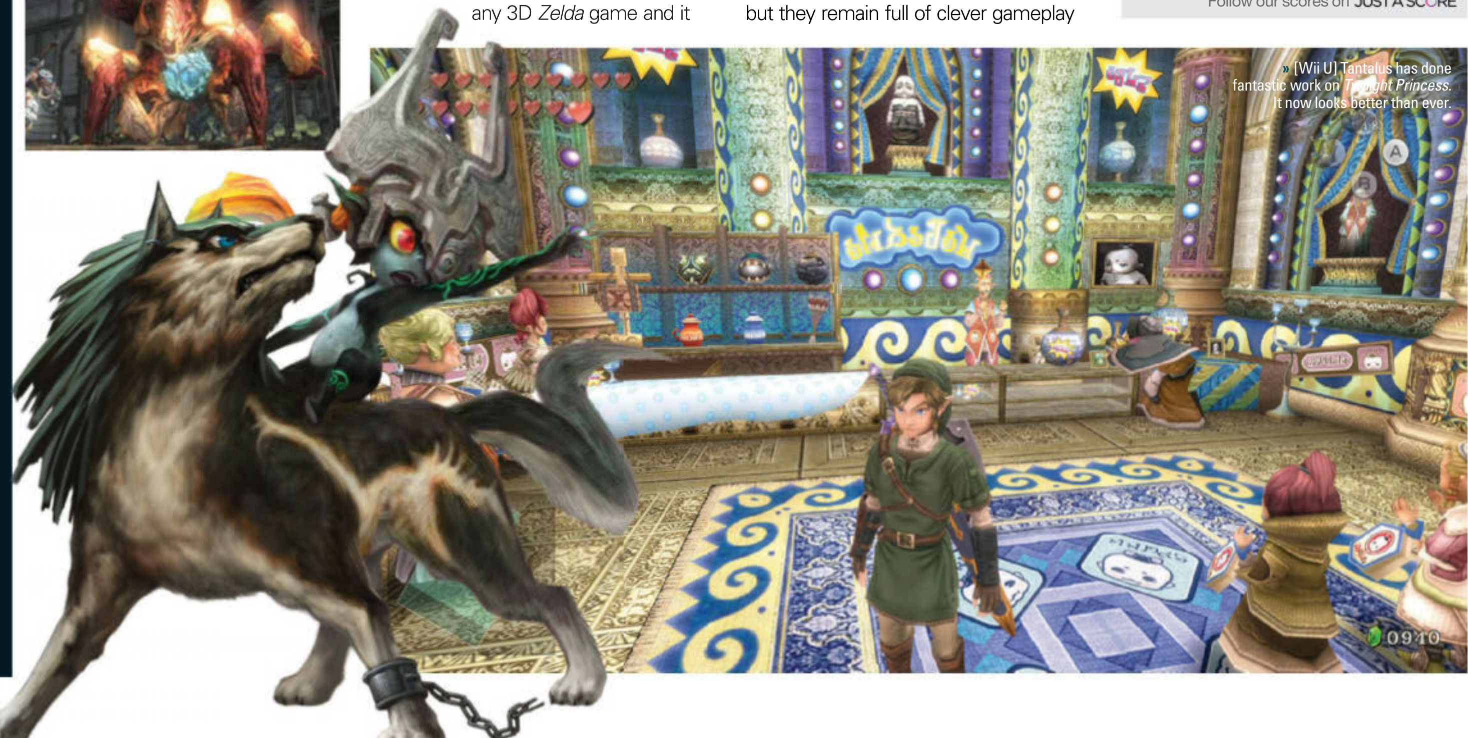
The other big draw of *Twilight Princess,* even after all this time, is its story. While it initially appears to riff off any other *Zelda* game, it soon builds to have quite a distinctive and original tone and is certainly the darkest game in the series to date. Link's shape-shifting abilities, the introduction of the mischievous Midna and the mysterious Zant all do their part to separate *Twilight Princess* from other games in the series and it remains rich in personality, even if the many dull fetch quests remove some of the shine.

Ultimately, *Twilight Princess HD* is a cracking update of an enjoyable *Zelda* game. We're still not sure if *Twilight Princess* deserves this sort of lavish makeover, but now we've experienced, we've definitely enjoyed it. ✱

## In a nutshell

**It's a good eight hours too long but *Twilight Princess HD* is a game that has been given a lot of care and attention. As it stands, it's arguably the best iteration of the game we are likely to ever see.**



» [Wii U] Tantalus has done fantastic work on *Twilight Princess.* It now looks better than ever.

# RETROROUND-UP

>> Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download

## Revolution: 25th Anniversary Collection

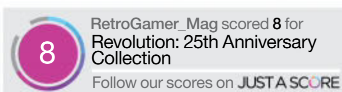
» **System:** PC » **Cost:** £29.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

**In a world that's all too eager to embrace the digital medium, it's pleasing to know that compilations like this still exist. Revolution's founder, Charles Cecil is a big fan of the classic computer box sets that were so popular during the Eighties and early Nineties, so this 25th anniversary collection has been created accordingly.**

Bound in a rather classy box, it features every single game the studio has produced, with the exception of the licensed game *Gold And Glory: The Road To El Dorado*, meaning you get the five *Broken Sword* games, *In Cold Blood*, *Beneath A Steel Sky* and the developer's first game, *Lure Of The Temptress*. Oh, and the director's cut of *Broken Sword* and the remaster of *Broken Sword 2* have also been included too. Needless to say, adventure fans are going to be extremely happy.

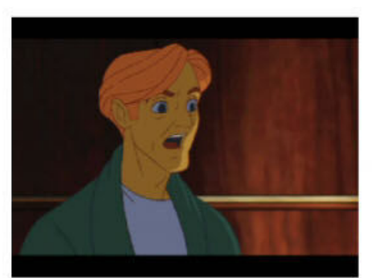
In addition to eight great games, all of which stand the test of time with varying degrees of success, Revolution's compilation also features plenty of superb bonuses, including brilliant comics from Dave Gibbons, numerous double-sided posters, and a USB stick containing all the music from Revolution's games. It's a wonderful treasure-trove of items guaranteed to please fans, but the true highlight of the collection is the excellent episodic documentaries that have been included. They're surprisingly frank at times, highlighting the highs and lows of the company and serve as important snapshots of various points of the studio's history. While the game content has an insular appeal, the documentary is fascinating, giving great insight into the difficulties of creating games and staying relevant in a difficult industry.

Ultimately, though, it's the games that matter here and the quality is undeniable. *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon* and *In Cold Blood* are perhaps the weakest links, but they're still fun to play and, like *Rare Replay*, allow you to see how far Revolution has progressed in the last quarter of a century. A solid selection of fantastic titles, providing of course, you enjoy adventure games.





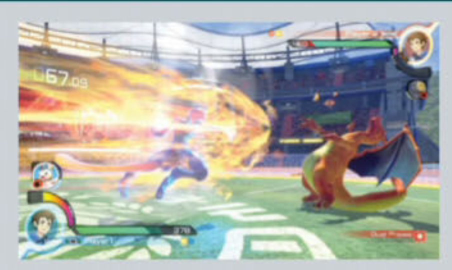

» [PC] All five *Broken Sword* games are included, meaning fans of George and Nicole are going to be extremely happy.



» [PC] George can't get over the value for money Revolution's new compilation represents.




» [PC] Revolution's first game, *Lure Of The Temptress* is included and it's still a delight to play.



## Pokkén Tournament

» **System:** Wii U
» **Buy it for:** £39.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

Well this is a pleasant surprise. *Pokkén*'s fighting mechanics clearly aren't as deep as its peers, but with so little competition on the Wii U that's not much of an issue. The ability to fight on two distinct planes is a nice touch and it instantly makes *Pokkén* stand out from more traditional fighters, but it also adds a surprising amount of strategy to proceedings too, as you're able to easily evade your opponent's attacks. The character roster is admittedly small with only 16 characters available, but, like *Street Fighter V*, they are extremely diverse ensuring no two characters play the same. Overall, it's a fun and robust brawler with plenty of crossover appeal.



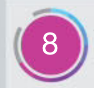

RetroGamer_Mag scored 7 for
Pokkén Tournament
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE




## Trackmania Turbo

» **System:** PS4 (tested), Xbox One, PC
» **Buy it for:** £29.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

*Trackmania*'s been providing tricky driving courses for over a decade now and this latest instalment ramps up the retro appeal with a Nineties arcade aesthetic, complete with bright colours and outlandish tracks. There are dozens of time attack courses for players to challenge, with a difficulty level that ramps up to the point that you'll fail a dozen times before even achieving a bronze medal – thankfully, the 'one more go' compulsion kicks in quickly. Multiplayer modes include online, split-screen and even a crazy mode in which lots of people steer one car. The interface isn't perfect, with the track creation tool proving particularly awkward, but there's a lot to enjoy.




RetroGamer_Mag scored 8 for
Trackmania Turbo
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



## Hyrule Warriors Legends

» **System:** 3DS
» **Buy it for:** £29.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

We can only assume that witchcraft has been used in this 3DS update of *Hyrule Warriors*, as we can't understand how Nintendo has squeezed such a technically proficient game into the humble handheld. Sure, it runs at a low frame-rate and has fewer enemies on screen, but this *Zelda* take on *Dynasty Warriors* is amazingly impressive and great fun to play too. Not only that, it's filled with additional material, including five new characters – Linkle being the standout – the ability to switch between characters with a simple touch of the screen and a brand new map in Adventure Mode. A solid update that's only let down by a lack of cross-platform saves between the 3DS and Wii U.




RetroGamer_Mag scored 8 for
Hyrule Warriors Legends
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE




» [ZX Spectrum] Strike a light, guv'nor.

» [C64] Don't you ever yearn for change?

# TRICKS AND FOOLS

» [Web] Why must the youth fight against themselves?

*Dark Castle* is an unusual twist on single screen platform games; the screen is black apart from the flickering torches on the walls, the player and a few other elements. The player carries a match at the start of each level and can use it to temporarily light their surroundings – as seen in our screenshot, because the image would be quite sparse otherwise – and then has to navigate around using that brief moment of illumination before relying on their memory and perhaps just a little luck for the rest of the stage. Kikstart.eu/dark-castle-spec will head over to a Russian website, so click the game's artwork to get the download.

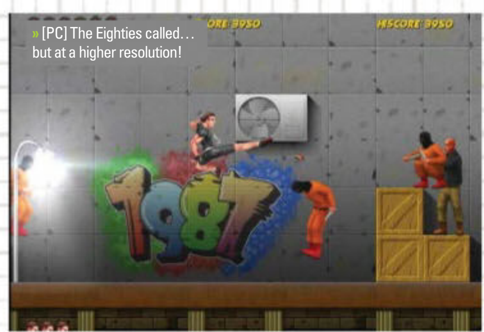
Billed by developer theloon as a homage to *Balloon Fight* on the NES, Atari 2600 prototype *Balloon Girl* is an action game where the lady in question must be guided through constantly scrolling landscapes. The only control available to the player is pressing the fire button which causes the already airborne young lady to ascend and, if she's been pushed to the left by one of the walls, right as well – a life is lost when making contact with roaming nasties or the left hand edge of the playfield. Kikstart.eu/balloon-girl-2600 heads to the discussion about the game at the Atari Age forums.

Canadian 8-bit developer Mr NOP recently released his conversion of the Commodore PET game *Slime* on the C64 before remixing it to take advantage of the host computer's extra colour as *Slime Deluxe*. The titular substance starts small but grows over time, launching cells which attack the player – the gameplay is the kind of simple but frantic action we'd expect from a 1982 title where just keeping things under control rapidly becomes an adrenaline-fuelled challenge. Kikstart.eu/slime-c64 and Kikstart.eu/slime-deluxe-c64 go to a bug fixed version of the original and that more colourful upgrade respectively.

And sticking with the conversions, a faithful web version of the C16 game *Ghost Town* has been made available by developer AWSM. As with the original game – written by Udo Gertz in 1985 for publication by Kingsoft and Anirog – this has 19 screens of hazards, puzzles to solve and helpful hidden items to be discovered, which aid in the game's primary quests of finding the town's riches and destroying Belegro the evil wizard. This treasure can be found by exploring Kikstart.eu/ghost-town-web.

# NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at: **retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk**

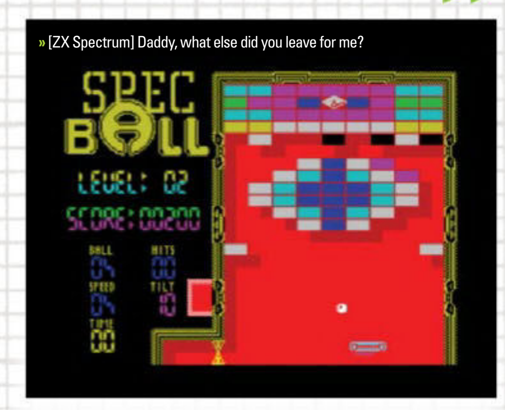

» [PC] The Eighties called… but at a higher resolution!

## FROM THE SHADOWS

*Shadow Gangs* is still an ongoing project at the time of writing, but it already looks interesting. Based on 16-bit era titles like *Shadow Warriors* or Shinobi, this is a scrolling beat-'em-up for PC, Mac and Linux where a typical Eighties hero must punch, kick and throw shurikens at hordes of attacking baddies. It quite literally has a retro theme with updated visuals!

The game's official website is ShadowGangs.com where more information about the project's progress can be found along with information on how to support the developers through Steam Greenlight.

> "This is a beat-'em-up where a Eighties hero must punch, kick and throw shurikens at baddies"



» [ZX Spectrum] Daddy, what else did you leave for me?

## DO IT AGAIN

*Specball 2016* is the latest addition to a large and varied library of *Arkanoid*-style games for the Spectrum, but don't let familiarity put you off because it's also well implemented and offers a couple of interesting features, including a neat solution to the almost endless problem of being stuck at the end of a stage with just one tricky brick remaining.

It was ported by Zoltan Nemeth from the 1988 Enterprise release *Enterball* which was by Hungarian developers A-Studio and removing the bricks in front of Kikstart.eu/specball-2016-spec reveals a download.

# HOMEBREW HEROES

**There's not much to do after you crash-land on an alien world, so we had a chat with Castaway developer Juan J Martínez about cramming maps into small spaces and blasting Iron Maiden to pass time**



THE BIG INTERVIEW · JUAN J MARTÍNEZ

**Where did the idea for *Castaway* come from?**

I wanted to make a simple 'platforming' game. I was working on a generic main character animation when listening to *Iron Maiden*'s *Satellite 15…The Final Frontier.* I decided that, like in the song, the player would be stranded in space. After I had that starting point, it was rather easy to make all the pieces fit together.

**Can you tell us roughly how long the game took to actually create?**

I always use version control software to manage the code, and according to the log it was around two months of my free time.

**And what challenges did you encounter during the game's development?**

I started writing the game in the C programming language with the SP1 sprite library because they allow me to make games in a short period of time, but the memory requirements are quite high. Working with these tools, *Castaway* is certainly too big for the ZX Spectrum 48K. When I realised my mistake I already had the music and some specific code I didn't want to throw away to target the 128K, so I rewrote almost all the C code in assembler to save space. That was a lot of unexpected work, and the end result was really tight!

**What kind of feedback has *Castaway* received from players so far?**

It has been very positive. My idea was to provide a good challenge, and still allow the average player to complete the game. There are lots of ways of playing *Castaway*, and for some people it feels short when playing it on an emulator and saving states, which is a very different experience than loading the game in the real hardware and spending an hour or so getting to know the map and completing the game. Some players requested a sequel for the 128K Spectrum, and I think it may happen at some point.

**And looking back at it now, is there anything you'd have done differently?**

I would have simplified the graphics, for example getting rid of the detailed backgrounds and the shadows. That could have allowed me to make the game larger without requiring 128K.

**Finally, can you tell us what you're working on next?**

I have in mind a couple of projects for the Amstrad CPC, the other 8-bit machine I love playing with. I'm exploring ideas at the moment, so it is too soon to tell. Currently I'm working with a publisher to make a cassette release of *The Return of Traxtor*, with both the ZX Spectrum 48K and Amstrad CPC versions. I always release my games as a free download, so I'm very excited with this!

» [ZX Spectrum] The security drone needs to blink occasionally.



» Enough tools to repair a spaceship?



# DO YOU REMEMBER?

Although he's probably better known for Amiga titles like *Sword Of Sodan* or *Datastorm*, Søren Grønbech's first game under his pseudonym of Sodan was the 1985 release *Cracker's Revenge* on the Commodore 64. The software industry has worked together to capture every single cracker and the only way to free them is by gathering six keys scattered around the large map in this scrolling collect-'em-up.

And it's as tough as nails in ways that would even embarrass a lot of so-called 'masocore' (a cross between masochistic and hardcore) games these days and working out where to go and how to get there safely is a must, but it's still surprisingly addictive. Kikstart.eu/crackers-c64 is the recently-released Hokuto Force crack since it adds a few features and optional cheats to make *Cracker's Revenge* a little more approachable.

» [C64] Just in case somebody playing had forgotten who made this game!

» [C64] Why is foliage sometimes fatal in videogames exactly...?

» [Intellivision] Space-bound one or two-player blasting at its most frantic.

Gaming REVIEWS

# INTYBASIC 2015 PROGRAMMING CONTEST

» **FORMAT:** INTELLIVISION » **DEVELOPER:** VARIOUS » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/INTYBASIC-2015 » **PRICE:** FREE

IntyBASIC is a means to develop programs for the Intellivision in a easy-to-use dialect of BASIC, so a few fans came up with the idea of arranging a programming competition around it; the result was 13 entries which covered a range of genres.

Gamers who enjoy destruction can look at the frantically-paced shooter *Space Versus* or the more surreal *Bowl Bust* where a bowling ball is used to fell various Intellivision characters. Swapping shooting for dodging gives us bullet hell-inspired *IntelliBullet*, and classic downhill skiing action from *Slalom* and *Goatnom*, where the titular creature must devour foodstuffs thrown by an angry farmer while avoiding less edible items.

*Mermaid* is an underwater explorer to find the Queen's crown and return it to her without being harmed by assorted sea life. *TRAMP* and *Alligator Swamp* star trampolinist 'Nobaudi Holmes' and a monkey respectively, and both involve bouncing; one has scores of trampolines lined up to see how far you can travel while the other makes use of turtles to grab coconuts from a tree.

There are a couple of traditional designs in the form of *Classic Battle Ship* and *Tic Tac Toe* which are well executed and support one or two players. The competition winner was the remarkable *Whale Hunt* which tests both your brains and your reactions, turning the clock back to when whale oil was an essential commodity and hunters would stalk their prey across the sea before downing them with a well-aimed harpoon.

Some of these games should be considered works in progress since the coders are actively expanding on them based on feedback, but even in their current form they offer quite a bit of solid entertainment.

RetroGamer_Mag scored **9** for Intybasic 2015 Programming Contest
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

» [Intellivision] Admiral, there be whales here!

» [Intellivision] They took my grandfather. That's why I really hate sharks.

**Don’t forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates**

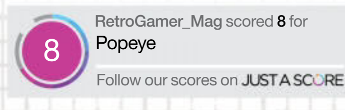
 RetroGamerUK  @RetroGamer_Mag  retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

# POPEYE

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE VIC-20 » **PRICE:** FREE
» **DEVELOPER:** ADRIAN FOX
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/POPEYE-VIC

Olive Oyl has taken to showing her love for Popeye by flinging into the air hearts, musical notes or letters from the word ‘help’ when she’s in trouble and, naturally, her spinach-guzzling hero is expected to collect them all. But there’s also his longtime enemy Bluto to worry about, as well as the bottle-throwing Sea Hag and her vulture. Well-timed punches will at least temporarily deal with some of the hazards and there’s a helpful tin of spinach on each stage.

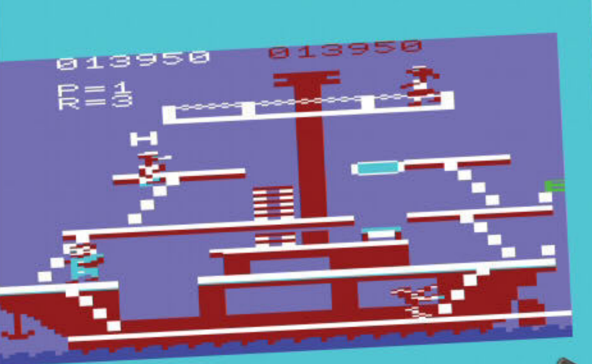
Based on Nintendo’s coin-op from 1982, this is a decent conversion of the original which sports three unique stages to complete before the action loops and the difficulty is increased. Players will need swift reflexes to deal with threats – timing of punches takes a little acclimatisation – and the ability to remain calm under pressure. Please note that this game needs a 32K expanded VIC-20 to run.




» [VIC-20] He lives in a caravan and there’s a hole in the middle.



» [VIC-20] I am dying, forever trying, to be with you, who can say?



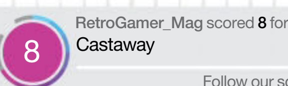

# CASTAWAY

» **FORMAT:** ZX SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** JUAN J MARTÍNEZ
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/CASTAWAY-SPEC » **PRICE:** FREE

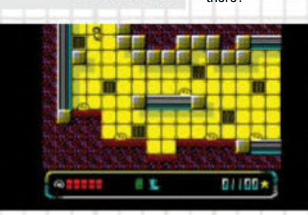
After coming down with something of a bump on an alien world, it’s very comforting to find a friendly doctor to help with repairs to your ship… assuming his computer-managed base hadn’t recently gone completely haywire to the point where he can’t even get to his tools!

So the priority becomes wading through the automated security systems to power down the main computer, making the complex safe and then dealing with that broken spaceship; the doctor hands over a key for the first door, but after that the unlucky spaceman is left to his own devices…and those of the computer.

There’s a degree of pixel-perfect timing of moves and leaps between platforms to worry about in *Castaway* and, although there are pick-ups scattered throughout the building that help by increasing the player’s jumping power or health, good reactions and hand coordination is recommended in this solid adventure.




» [ZX Spectrum] Why would anyone leave a security key all the way over there?



» [Amiga] They were chopping them up, they were chopping them down.

# ROUNDUP

Jordan Mechner’s impressive brawler *Karateka* was ported to a bewildering number of home computers during the mid-Eighties but one major player missed out on a port, the poor old Amiga. Over 30 years later that injustice has been rectified by Meynaf, who took apart the Atari ST version to convert the heroic struggle against Akuma. Kikstart.eu/karateka-amiga heads over to the thread EAB where discussion and downloads can be found for your pleasure.

We’ve just received the news that *Metal Warrior* series creator Lasse ‘Cadaver’ Oorni has finished his latest C64 game *Hessian*. It’s taken a while to arrive and we’ll have a proper look soon, but C64 owners who can’t wait – and, considering the quality of *Metal Warrior 4* and *BOFH: Servers Under Siege* in particular, we really couldn’t blame them – should head to Kikstart.eu/hessian-c64.

# HUGOHUNT

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 16 » **DEVELOPER:** JENS ENGEL » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/HUGOHUNT-C16 » **PRICE:** FREE

The original *Hugohunt* – called *Hugojagd XE* – is an Atari 8-bit game released in 1985 by Stefan Dorndorf where a surprisingly happy spherical character is guided around mazes, collecting items and working towards the exit all without running out of energy. There are static demons to avoid or occasionally destroy, locks which require a key to open or blobs which swap control to a second smiling face.

This is primarily a puzzle game, but with maze game elements, with each screen having an optimal solution – which isn’t always obvious – so thinking ahead to avoid any wrong moves is very important for success, even on those stages where there is a ghost slowly but inexorably homing in on the player. The graphics and sound are very primitive but the game is enjoyable to play and even comes with two C64 ports on the disk, one with watered down levels to make it playable on touchscreen devices.




RetroGamer_Mag scored **7** for
Hugohunt
Follow our scores on JUSTASCORE







» [C16] Today’s game of *Hugohunt* is brought to you by the number two.

» [C16] Because they knew that they were missing those boys with a mission.

# MAILBAG

**HAVE YOUR SAY...** SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

**WIN!** Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one

## STAR LETTER

## FONT OF LOST KNOWLEDGE

Good day sir/madam,
I would like to make a minor complaint about the typesetting and font colours of issue 152 of **Retro Gamer**.

Ever since I started reading **Retro Gamer** I found that the smallest fonts in the magazine are very hard to read, but lately it seems to be getting worse. No matter how much I try, I could not read the captions under or over most of the screen grabs in issue 152.

An even more serious matter for me is the typesetting and colouring of the *Trantor* article. Thanks to an apparent misalignment of print layers the white on black font was so wobbly I could not make out the article text at all.

I am hoping that this will be corrected in further issues.

GJ Fennema



» [Amstrad] Some games lend themselves to dark design schemes, but misprinted text can definitely ruin things.

**We gather that reading captions has become a problem for some of our readers, as you're not the first person to complain about them recently. We're going to look at ways to make them much easier to read in the future, whether that's by making different colour choices or even more pronounced measures.**

**However, the *Trantor* misprinting problem seems like a much more serious issue, but is one that's easily solved. The newsagent should be your first port of call, while subscribers worldwide can contact retrogamer@servicehelpline.co.uk if anything's wrong with the issue. What's more, contact phone numbers are always listed on the flannel panel on the right of the Mailbag. Hopefully this eMag should go some way to cheering you up.**

## DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

### The Cabinet

**Having already skipped from Xbox 360 to SNES and Wii U this year, Darran's latest acquisition has been an arcade cabinet – leading to a brilliant retro game night in which Jon and Drew *thoroughly* tested its durability with *Combat School*'s arm wrestling event and *The King Of Fighters '98*. Thankfully it was up to the task!**



## GUNSHIP BLUNDER

Hello **Retro Gamer** team,
Congrats on another high-quality well-made issue that is issue 152! Normally you guys give us a hint at what awaits us in the next issue, so as a *Turrican* fan I was thrilled to see my favourite game being covered on the most excellent Commodore 64.

But, as a fan, I need to point out something – on your level bosses section, there is a mix-up. On page 48 you have the Oculus boss but the pic on page 49 of Enormous Gunship should be Oculus, the UFO is only a mid-level boss. So sadly some of your readers will never see Gunship which I consider the biggest and best boss.

Anyhow, had to straighten the record as I love that game, keep it going over there, you all are doing an amazing job helping us keep in touch with our retro passion.

PS: after reading the article, I had to fire up my C64 and unleash the crazy gyro-scope weapon. You *Turrican* fans know what I mean!

Mark Conroy

**Whoops, gremlins crept into the system with that one! Still, we are glad you enjoyed the feature other than that minor hiccup. Here's a screenshot of the excellent boss to compensate for missing it out last time.**

## REMEMBERING THE FALLEN

Dear **Retro Gamer,**
Thanks for your great mag which continues to cheer and entertain every time it drops through the letterbox. Let's be honest, 2016 hasn't exactly been chock-a-block with merriment so far. The deaths of Alan Rickman, Lemmy and David Bowie saddened fans across the globe. These brilliant individuals brought joy and inspiration to millions of people and since their untimely deaths they have been rightly remembered and celebrated for their outstanding contribution to film, music and popular culture. This process of reflection and celebration is what happens when any significant figure from popular culture dies and this is how it should be.

However, when we talk of popular culture in 2016 we are no longer referring to just music, film, art and literature. Indeed, the games industry – now 40 years old – is by far the most creative industry on the planet. Yet the pioneers of gaming remain largely unknown and when one of them dies it often goes unreported and their talents left unrecognised.

Ask the average non-retro gaming 40-year-old in the street if the names Jonathan Smith, Bruce Carver, Mike Singleton or Jeremy Smith ring a bell. They'll probably look at you blankly and maybe hazard a guess about the





» How should we best raise awareness of gaming pioneers, so that their lives are celebrated appropriately?



» [C64] Here's the incredible gunship boss that we accidentally left out of the *Turrican II* feature. Whoops!

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Manchester City back four in 1981. Yet bring up Clive Sinclair's ZX Spectrum, the Commodore 64, *Hyper Sports*, *Green Beret*, *Cobra*, *Beach Head*, *Raid Over Moscow*, *Leader Board*, *Lords Of Midnight* or *Thrust* and I guarantee that a healthy percentage of the same folk will break into a big smile as they recall those wonderful games that brought so much fun to their childhood.

Now ask the same chaps if they knew that the makers of all these games had died. Hardly any of them will know but almost all of them will feel a degree of grief when you tell them.

So I guess what I'm saying is that we need to recognise the significance of great game developers just as we do with great musicians, writers and filmmakers. And it's incredibly important that we remember the coding innovators of the Eighties when they pass away. Their achievements and talents should not be forgotten – they need to be celebrated, remembered and respected. After all, they pioneered the greatest entertainment phenomenon of the last 40 years. In return, remembering them and saying thank you is the really least we can do.

Martin Grundy

**As you'll have seen from last issue's main news, we always try to remember gaming pioneers. The big problem is that of recognition. Lemmy and David Bowie made their names on stage and Alan Rickman on-screen, but (with the notable exception of Kevin Toms) coders are rarely so visually associated with their creative works – indeed, many coders are only credited in the code, or pseudonymously. Readers, how would you ensure that gaming pioneers are better remembered by society at large?**

### THE UNFULFILLED

Dear **RG** team,

Where, oh where has The Unconverted gone? By my reckoning, the last one was in issue 138 – over a year ago now! I miss discovering new games to fire up in MAME, and I'm sure I'm not the only one. Is there any chance of it ever coming back?

Kyle Jordan

**Fear not, Kyle – after a well-earned break, The Unconverted is coming back refreshed in the near future.**

**The well of arcade games that never came to homes is far from dry after all, so look forward to the likes of *Ninja Baseball Bat Man* and *Asura Blade* making an appearance soon.**



» [Arcade] There are plenty of cool arcade games left to cover, like *Asura Blade*.




» [Arcade] We thought we'd overed *Ninja Baseball Bat Man*, but it turns out we hadn't. Time to rectify that!



# From the forum

» www.retrogamer.net/forum

**Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know...**

## Quake memories

**ArchaicKoala**
I dread to think what the phone bill was like from me playing *Quake* via 'Wireplay'! Great memories of learning to rocket jump with others on there.

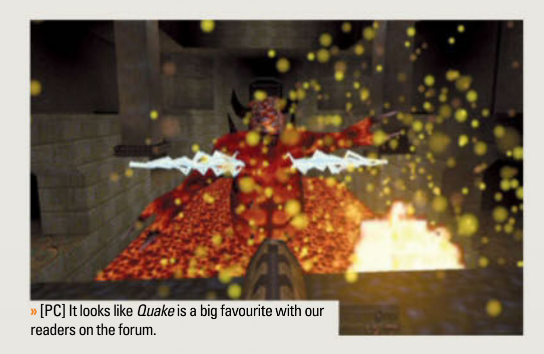
**The Beans**
My history with the *Quake* series is one of abject indifference until *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*, when the multiplayer finally became worth playing.

**theantmeister**
I just finished my first playthrough of the *Scourge Of Armagon* mission pack and it was a blast. Modern shooters should be more like it – fast-paced, action packed and simple fun!

**ncf1**
*Doom* and its sequel had blown me away, and *Quake* took it one step further for me. To me it's amusing that *Doom* is remembered with more reverence when *Quake* is the superior series... But then it might just be me.

**nakamura**
I played it after playing PSone *Doom* and it just felt somewhat bland and lifeless. The atmosphere wasn't as good as console *Doom*. The enemies less interesting and levels too brown.

**psj3809**
Funnily enough I never got into *Quake*. But *Quake II* I just loved. Played that game to the end. Halfway through the game I bought a new Voodoo graphics card, the game just looked amazing after that. An epic game.



» [PC] It looks like *Quake* is a big favourite with our readers on the forum.

**paranoid marvin**
The first time I saw *Quake* running with the 3DFX patch was truly memorable.

**antsbull**
I also bought a VooDoo 3DFX 2 card simply to play *Quake II*, and loved it to bits – the dynamic lighting, the industrial soundtrack, the fast gameplay made it a stunner.

**markopoloman**
*Quake* was stunning when it first came out. I remember linking PC's together to play *Doom 2* – but *Quake*... *Wow!* So fast, freedom of movement and multiplayer was a bloody good laugh.

**thingonaspring**
*Quake III: Arena* was the only Dreamcast game that I had to ban my flatmate from playing when we were a bit drunk.




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# ENDGAME




## CYBER-LIP

» When the central computer controlling Earth's military defence systems goes haywire and starts attacking the people it's supposed to be defending, who's going to stop it? No, not John Connor – that's a different franchise. The veteran human soldiers Rick and Brook are the planet's only hope in SNK's run-and-gun. Let's skip to the good bit and see what happens when our heroes defeat a system that was reprogrammed for evil…




01

» Hooray for Rick and Brook! They've successfully stopped the Cyber-Lip computer, and peace once again reigns on our fair planet. Satisfied with a job well done, they pop back into their mean green flying machine for the long ride home.




02

» The president calls up to congratulate our heroes on a job well done. That's pretty nice of him, really – it's not exactly Ronnie inviting the dudes for a burger, but we like a commander in chief with a personal touch.



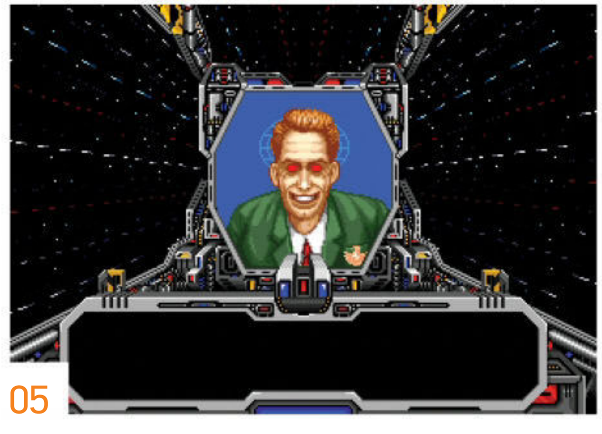

03

» He remarks on the lack of obstacles facing them now, which seems a tad premature given that Rick and Brook just wiped out most of Earth's defence systems – surely there's at least the small task of rebuilding those to consider?




04

» The Earth is ours? Well of course it is, we live there and Rick and Brook just fought to defend it… oh. Oh *no*. Unless we're mistaken, and we're really hoping we are, this is going to end very badly indeed for not only our heroes, but everyone on Earth.



05

» Oh crap. The glowing eyes tell the whole story – this dude's an alien and he's just managed to get Earth to destroy its only hope of repelling an invasion. Rick and Brook? They're not heroes, they're schmucks that became pawns in his evil scheme.


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